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# **Media, gender and domestic relations in post-Saddam Iraq**

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## **Abstract**

The regime change of 2003 transformed the media environment in Iraq from one that was strictly limited and monopolised by the state, to one without any restrictions imposed by state agencies. Gender culture and ‘family values’ have especially been contested as a consequence of the transformation of access to the media. The common assumption is that sexualised media content, and also the increasingly privatised nature of media technologies, are contributing towards the transformation of gender culture, with worries that Iraqi women in particular are turning into Western women and becoming estranged from their genuine Iraqi identity. The aim of this research is to investigate the nature of the evolving relationship between media and gender culture in post-Saddam Iraq. The importance of this investigation lies in the fact that since 2003, most research on Iraq has focused on war. This is also true of studies on gender relations. This research, however, focuses on other developments that happened as a result of the regime change, paving the way for struggles over many issues, including gender culture and Iraqi identity. The project was carried out using the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews. The interviews were carried out in Baghdad and Erbil, giving a perspective of the urban middle class Iraqi Arabs and Kurds on the subject. The research demonstrates that although the media provides windows for Iraqi women to distance themselves from prevalent patriarchal rules that control their sexuality, the ‘realities’ of local life have not allowed for the ‘Westernisation’ of gender relations in post-Saddam Iraq. Since the media is viewed as a threat to the sexual honour, an important element of Iraqi gender culture, there is a tendency to reassert this notion in the processes of the redefinition of the cultural identity of Iraqi people that was triggered by the 2003 war. This thesis offers new insights into gender relations in post-Saddam Iraq, focussing especially on the update on media in this period, and how this relates to the constitution of Iraqi identity

and gender relations in families. It also offers a re-working of the concept of 'honour'; one that embeds this into an analysis of Iraq's hegemonic masculine system.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

BP	British Petroleum
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation
CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
DBS	Direct Broadcast Satellite
DW	Deutsche Welle
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
IGC	Iraq Governing Council
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMIE	International Mission for Iraqi Elections
IRIB	Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting
IRNA	Islamic Republic News Agency
IS	The Islamic State
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG	Kurdistan Region Government
MBC	Middle East Broadcasting Center
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NCRC	National Council of the Revolutionary Command
RCC	The Revolutionary Command Council]
TCCDR	Tribal Criminal and Civil Disputes Regulation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refuge

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1.1 Struggle for Identity**

“My fellow citizens, at this hour American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger” (BBC News 2003). On the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2003, with this sentence, the then US President, George W. Bush, announced the beginning of a war that changed the face of Iraq forever. As is clear from this statement, this war had some specific and clearly stated goals, one of which was to free the Iraqi people and transform the country into a viable democracy. During the years of occupation (2003-2011) the emancipation of the Iraqi people, and helping them to build a free, democratic and prosperous Iraq, formed an important part of US policy. For decades, since the time of President Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921), the promotion of democracy abroad has been an intermittent dimension of US foreign policy (Dalacoura 2005). In 1994 in his State of the Union address, President Bill Clinton stressed that as democracies never go to war with each other, the US needs to embark on plans for democratisation in non-democratic countries. He emphasised that promoting democracy was a pillar of his administration’s foreign policy (Mansfield and Snyder 1995). The 9/11 attacks in 2001, however, took promoting democracy as part of US foreign policy to a different level. Since these attacks, the Bush administration’s Middle East policy has clearly been based on democratisation. In his second inaugural address President Bush stated: “it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world” (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor 2006: I). This policy had two dimensions: one was an aggressive action towards terrorist groups in the Middle East and the regimes that helped them; the other one was the democratisation of countries in the region

in order to prevent them from harbouring terrorists. This was to help to defeat terrorist groups in “their ‘global struggle’ against the US” (Dalacoura 2005: 963). Now regime change in the form of military action was justified in order to spread democracy and to eradicate extremism and terrorism (Stewart 2005). Hence the aim of establishing regime changes in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Gender equality has also been repeatedly stated as one of the goals and achievements of these wars. In 2004 “President Bush... hailed the liberation of 25 million women in Afghanistan and Iraq and vowed to continue promoting democracy -- especially in the Middle East -- so that more women can claim “their rightful place in societies that were once incredibly oppressive and closed”” (Chen and Reynolds 2004). Bush makes a comparison between women’s status pre and post war. For him, women’s status in Afghanistan and Iraq during the pre-war era was disastrous, and the claimed successes have been achieved through the process of democratisation that was triggered as a result of the war. As will be seen throughout this thesis, however, gender equality has certainly not been achieved in Iraq, as women are still subject to the continuation of forms of patriarchal authority and rules. In fact, women’s status has deteriorated in many areas as a direct result of the war and the chaos and insatiability that ensued afterwards.

Creating a free media environment in Iraq was another important goal for the Bush administration. In a speech in 2005 President Bush stated, “all successful democracies are built on five common foundations, one of which is a “vibrant free press” that “informs the public, ensures transparency and prevents authoritarian backsliding” (Rohde 2005: 1). As a result of this vision, the Bush administration embarked on a \$200-million-dollar project to establish free press in Iraq. This project, which was run by the Pentagon, was “the largest attempt ever by the United States, or any country, to help create independent media in another nation” (ibid).

Developments such as the above have made post-Saddam Iraq a particularly important era. The US project of 'exporting' democracy to the region, and especially the Iraq war, are unsurprisingly controversial matters. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) the stated goal of promoting democracy by the US has been met by outright suspicion, and American policy is viewed as a way of consolidating its hegemony in the region; to secure the precious oilfields of Iraq, and to help Israel to control the Palestinians.

The counter view to this is that endorsed by those labelled neo-conservatives who see the promotion of democracy as a meaningful foreign policy goal for the US. In this regard Dalacoura argues that: "the Bush administration is serious about democracy, both as a pragmatic means of eliminating terrorism and as an ideal" (2005: 974). Whichever argument one believes in, there is a fact that cannot be ignored: America had big plans for Iraq. An important issue here is that the US has not been the only player in post-Saddam Iraq. There are other influential forces in Iraq that did not necessarily share the American vision for the country. During the period of Ba'ath rule (1968-2003) the regime managed to marginalise any forces that opposed its ideology. Everything was supposed to be strictly in line with the party's objectives. All political, economic, social and cultural spheres were completely under the regime's control, and any opposition to the regime's ideology and policies had severe consequences. Even the influential institutions of religion and tribe were contained. Identity was key to Ba'ath policy. The country's identity was determined by the leader and was enforced by a combination of propaganda and force. The main identity was Ba'athist, which contained tenets such as Arabic, socialist, progressive, ant-imperialistic, and so on. Embracing any other identities was considered to be treason and was severely punished.

After the regime was defeated, many socio-political forces found a space to operate; they found themselves in a space in which a struggle concerning the identity of the country and the nation was going on. For years under various Iraqi regimes with 'secular tendencies',

and especially under Saddam, numerous religious factions in the country were either suppressed or brought under the patronage of the regime. After the regime was gone, these forces erupted like never before in the history of modern Iraq. By and large they had a completely different vision from that of the occupation forces. Many allied with the Islamic regime in Iran. Iran, having been labelled as one of the countries of the 'axis of evil' by the Bush administration and threatened with US attacks, sent its forces and allies to ruin the US's plans for the region, resulting in the proliferation of Shia militias (Petraeus 2007), which until this day exert great influence in Iraq. To make the scene more chaotic, the Sunni regimes and organisations in the region, particularly those of the Gulf, supported and sponsored the Sunni insurgency to counter the Shia surge in the country. This was seen as an important part of the puzzle of Iranian hegemony to dominate the region by forming 'the Shia crescent' (Eisenstadt and White 2005). The Sunni organisations had another reason for intervening in Iraq. They have historically seen the West, and the US in particular, as colonising and imperialistic forces that have always had plans to subjugate the Muslim *Ummah* (nation). In this regard, they are in agreement not only with Sunni militant groups such as Al-Qaeda, but also with the Iranian regime, and many other Shia organisations and militias in the region. Therefore, like the Iranian regime and its allies, they were also determined to destroy the US's plans for Iraq. In this chaotic scene, the Syrian regime's position possibly was the oddest of all. The Alawite regime that has traditionally been close to Iran (Alawites are considered by some to be a strand of the Shia sect) functioned as a corridor for the Sunni insurgency, particularly Al-Qaeda sponsored by Sunni regimes and organisations- the same regimes and organisations that later and after the revolution of 2011 sponsored jihadi groups against the Syrian regime. All these forces, many of them at war with each other, agreed on one thing: the failure of the US vision for the new Iraq; a vision that the US was forcibly pursuing by sending tens of thousands of troops, and thousands of

advisors and contactors, and spending hundreds of billions of dollars on the reconstruction of Iraq.

Soon after the collapse of the old regime, the debate over the identity of the new Iraq began. Was Iraq going to be a liberal democracy and an ally of the West, as the Americans wished, or was it going to be an Iranian style theocracy, or something else? The new constitution was at the centre of these debates. The role that Islam plays in the legal system of the country was one of the most contentious issues around the constitution, with some religious groups demanding that “Sharia be specified as the sole source of law” (Brown 2005: 3). The secular groups in the country fought for a compromise in which Sharia is one of the sources of law, and the moderate religious groups agreed, provided that no law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam. Instead, the secular groups secured articles that ensured that no law may be enacted that contradicts the principles of democracy, and the rights and basic freedoms stipulated in the constitution. The struggle over the identity of the country had begun.

The impact of these on-going political struggles was not limited only to the political sphere, as the struggle over the identity of the country influenced all aspects of society, including the cultural domain. It is clear that the cultural trajectory of the country in which the ‘fate’ of the traditions, values and norms of the society is determined has been an equally important issue for many Iraqi groups. When traditions, values and norms are mentioned in MENA, sexuality and gender are always at the forefront. Gender relations turned out to be a contentious issue even before the processes of drafting the constitution started. In July 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) formed the Iraq Governing Council (IGC) with members from a variety of Iraqi groups. As all the legislative and executive powers were in the hands of the CPA, the IGC did not possess any real power and was appointed to provide advice to the CPA. In December 2003, some of the members of the IGC decided to

transform a very important aspect of gender relations in Iraq. It is interesting to examine the extent to which gender is important for some groups, and that in the middle of the chaos and uncertainties that Iraq was witnessing at the time, these groups (mainly religious) turned to gender. The IGC passed a decree according to which the relatively progressive Iraqi Family Status Law of 1959, would be replaced by another law that regulated family matters under Sharia. “In times of upheaval, gender relations and gender identities become contested terrains as different political and social forces attempt to shape the future identity of the polity” (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009: 93). This attempt was not successful, but since then the same issue has surfaced several times, including during the times of the drafting of the constitution, triggering women’s rights groups to protest and pressurise political groups to prevent the change to the law.

The battle for the cultural values and norms of the society did not happen only around the constitution and other laws. Religious militias started fighting this battle on the ground. Sunni and Shia militias across the country have been trying to impose their interpretation of Islam, as well as Iraqi culture on people, using force. The ‘democratic’ process meant that many of these militias have now partaken in formal state formation processes and have a clear presence in state institutions. From the parliament to the executive, the religious factions, backed by millions of votes, have exerted influence to shape post-Saddam Iraqi identity. Family values are considered a key part of Iraqi identity. Therefore, these groups are particularly sensitive to any transformation of gender relations in Iraq, as they see gender relations as a backdoor that the imperialist forces of the West are using to dominate Muslims. Therefore, they are keen to maintain ‘genuine’ Iraqi gender relations according to which the power balance is in favour of men, keeping women subordinate to men, staying at home and taking on mainly domestic responsibilities. They have been successful at imposing hijab on women in many areas in Iraq and have attempted to implement sex segregation in public

places such as universities and schools (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009). Tribal forces have also found the perfect environment to promote their vision of gender relations. The weakness and instability of state institutions has led to them being unable to protect people, and this has pushed them further into tribal alliances, consolidating the patriarchal structures in society. All in all, Iraqi society has been going down the path of conservatism since 2003.

In this increasingly closed and conservative environment, there is another force that brings with it its own contradictions. After decades of absolute state monopoly over the media, the regime change of 2003 gave Iraqis a media environment which is rare to find in the region. This environment brought with it Western cultural products that are viewed as unhealthy by conservative sections of Iraqi society, particularly their values and norms around gender relations. Media technologies have introduced pictures and ideas that in many cases are radically different from what the conservative social forces consider to be legitimate and/or appropriate. In fact, there is a notion right across MENA that Muslim culture is under threat. The idea of a ‘cultural invasion’, which shares some tenets of the theories on cultural imperialism, is a popular theme in MENA. A quick Google search for this term (in Arabic ‘الغزو الثقافي’ and in Farsi ‘تهاجم فرهنگی’) will show hundreds of pages covering this topic. Religious websites and forums are particularly concerned with this theme. According to this viewpoint, after the West, and particularly the US, realised that the old-style colonialism is no longer effective, they turned to a subtler, yet cunning strategy to subjugate the Muslim *Ummah* by corrupting their moral values and making them adopt Western lifestyles. The secular ideologies of the West are injected into the minds of the Muslim people to strip them of their most important defence system- the religion of Islam- and leave them vulnerable to the West to be exploited. In an interview with Al-Khaleej newspaper, Sheikh Ahmed El-Tayeb, the grand imam of Al-Azhar, which is one of the most revered Sunni religious institutions in the world, stated that: “undoubtedly the Muslims



societies are target of a fierce cultural and ideological invasion committed by powerful media outlets” (Al-Khaleej, 2010). The Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, repeatedly brings up the issue of cultural invasion. He warns against “the enemy’s plots and its comprehensive cultural, ideological and political invasion using all the tools against the Islamic Revolution” (Mehr News Agency 2015).

One of the main areas that the West is focusing on in Iraq is gender and sexuality, according to this viewpoint. By imposing their sexually deviant attitudes on Muslim people, especially the Muslim youth, as well as their feminist ideologies which are seen as unnatural and harmful to women, the West is considered by some to be aiming to destroy the Muslim family, which is the bedrock of Muslim upbringing. In this comprehensive cultural and ideological onslaught, the media is the main weapon. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei also warns the Iranian people that hundreds of media outlets are working to negatively influence their culture; to encourage people to adopt a Western lifestyle (Entekhab 2013). People from different backgrounds have voiced their concern over the influence of Western cultural products, channelled by the media, on their culture and religion. Similar arguments have been heard from people in Iraq. Although the Iraqi government is largely indifferent towards this issue, religious leaders have shown their concern about the negative influence of Western/Westernised media products on their culture. They repeatedly warn people in Iraq that watching these shows will have a devastating influence, particularly on family relations. The most revered religious leader in Iraq, Ayatollah Ali Sistani, has issued fatwas (religious edicts) forbidding people from watching these shows. In response to one of his followers’ questions about watching Iraqi/Arabic/Foreign dramas, Ayatollah Sistani stated:

Considering that these drama shows most probably include scenes that are not compatible with sharia and moral values, it is not permissible to watch them for the

purpose of sexual pleasure or if there is a fear of watching them for this purpose. If fact, it is an obligatory caution not to watch them even without the purpose of sexual pleasure (Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani; 9: الاستفتاءات/ التلفزيون [Question 9/ TV]).

As will be shown in Chapter Two, Ayatollah Sistani's edicts are obligatory for his followers, who are in the millions. Media is also seen as a major factor in the rise in divorce cases in Iraq. The topic of the influence of media on gender relations appears frequently in the Iraqi media, with experts warning of the collapse of the family as an institution as a result of that. Protecting 'genuine' Iraqi gender identity, therefore, does not concern Islamic militias or religious leaders only. This thesis will show that 'ordinary' Iraqi citizens also feel that they need to protect their values that influence and organise gender relations in Iraq. For decades, under the subsequent regimes, particularly the 35 years of Ba'ath rule, values and norms in Iraqi society were strictly organised by the regime. The 2003 invasion brought about a 'democratic' system in which the views of a variety of groups needed to be heeded to. This is clear from the struggle over the constitution explained above. Media, which was previously regulated in the strictest possible way, was suddenly a free environment, bringing with it all sorts of pictures and ideas. The government in Iraq, unlike other countries of the region, such as Iran, cannot or does not want to regulate this environment. Therefore, the Iraqi people, and especially men prompted by tribal and religious leaders, have attempted to take the matter into their own hands, as will be shown in Chapters six and seven. It is a struggle over the identity of the Iraqi people; a struggle around what kind of people Iraqis are and what kind of values they embrace.

This, however, does not mean that people in Iraq simply avoid media technologies. On the contrary, satellite TV is very popular in Iraq and the extent of internet connections is increasing by the day. In fact, many religious parties and organisations in Iraq use media

technologies intensely to disseminate their ideologies; they have satellite TV channels and websites, and always try to keep up with new media technologies. These groups are not against modernisation and development; building a prosperous Iraq forms an important element of their narrative. They realise that without technology, including media technology, it is not possible to prosper in the modern world, so they want to adopt these technologies, but at the same time they want to do it without compromising the values and norms that are a crucial part of their identity, and here the conflict arises.

The media environment in Iraq is a very important area to explore, not least because of the complexity of the settings in which it operates and the abrupt dramatic developments that have happened post-2003. There has been some occasional research carried out into the media environment in post-Saddam Iraq; the political economy of the media (see Al-Rawi 2012), and on press freedom (see Kim 2011; Kim and Hama-Saeed 2008). However, there has been little research into media use and consumption in post-Saddam Iraq. The dramatic transformations in Iraq's media environment have attracted very little attention. Therefore, this research sets out to explore this very interesting and less explored area. The area of media consumption and use will be investigated to examine how the various pictures, ideas, concepts, and so on are mediated through these popular technologies, and how they interact with the cultural values of the country. This is important because:

The analysis of media systems in and of themselves is of limited significance. But examined as institutions within national and transnational processes of political liberalization and democratization, of social transformation and the emergence of gender equality, of economic globalization and pressures to fiscal modernization, the contradictory and ambivalent role of the media can become a significant analytic focus (Sreberny 2008: 18).

The ‘influence’<sup>1</sup> of media on values around gender relations is of concern to traditional Iraqi institutions, but equally to the ‘ordinary’ people. As a result, this thesis focuses particularly on media and gender, which is a very important dynamic that, despite its huge significance for the Iraqi society and the wider region, has been largely ignored in the post-Saddam era. Amongst the media technologies that have been chosen to investigate are satellite TV channels, as well as the internet, which obviously can be accessed using a variety of other tools such as personal computers, mobile phones, and tablets. Satellite TV channels are very popular in Iraq. There are hundreds of free channels in Arabic (and a fewer number in Kurdish) available in Iraq. The cheap price and the diversity of programmes mean that satellite TV is able to reach a vast number of the population from a variety of backgrounds. Young and old, rich and poor, uneducated and educated, women and men, urban and rural people, can easily have access to the programmes that they want. However, the internet is less accessible; it is much more expensive, and it requires a certain amount of knowledge to be able to use it. Even so, it provides services that make it an interesting technology to study. The ‘privatised’ nature of the internet is one of the important traits of this technology. For example, it can make watching TV a much more privatised experience. Also, it enables people to interact with each other. This is particularly important with regards to gender relations, as enables people to evade the traditional boundaries of sex segregation. As a result of their popularity, availability, and the unique capabilities of the DBS and the internet, this thesis will focus on these two media technologies.

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘influence’ will be explained in later in this thesis. Here the term is used to reflect Iraqi traditional institution’s perspective on media.

## **1.2 Gender and Media in MENA**

In 1996, Annabelle Sreberny called gender one of the blind-spots of international communication studies (Sakr 2004). This is particularly true when it comes to gender and media in MENA. Since then, more attention has been paid to the field of gender and media studies in the region. Even so, there is a dearth of research in this area; in particular, empirical studies are hard to come by. Therefore, this research is an attempt to shed light on some aspects of this increasingly important field. The importance of this work also lies in the fact that very few studies have so far looked at the dynamics between media and gender in Iraq after the quick proliferation of media post-2003. In the broader region this expansion started almost a decade earlier. Although not enough attention has been paid to research into media and gender in MENA, some of the literature has highlighted various important aspects of this field. Some authors have looked at media to see if it has opened up opportunities for women that were not available before. Bearing in mind that media is part of the wider power relations in any society, the following questions seem to be essential in unravelling gender and media issues: To what extent is media an agent of change when it comes to gender dynamics? Is it an emancipatory force that helps women challenge patriarchal restrictions? Or is it helping to consolidate patriarchy, for example because the elites have better access to media and because old-established institutions that promote patriarchy can exploit media to reinforce and reproduce patriarchal structures, further dominating women?

The satellite TV expansion that started in the 1990s, undoubtedly gave women in various MENA countries an opportunity to increase their presence in public spheres. Public spheres are restricted for citizens of MENA, due to the threat that the ruling elites feel from the public participation of their citizens. These restrictions are even more severe for female citizens, as the patriarchal structures in society prefer to push women into the private spaces of the home. In these societies, where the public sphere is dominated by men, TV has given

women the opportunity to challenge gender norms and to enter spaces that were very difficult to enter in the past. One area is women's presence as media professionals, such as reporters and presenters, and so on, on TV. With the arrival of satellite TV in the 1990s, women's sex appeal was used to 'woo' viewers to the increasing number of commercial channels. Even so, successful female anchors and reporters reporting from war zones, and also on political, social and economic matters, defied the conservative gender norms of society that encourage women's confinement to private spheres and female only environments. Their participation in an increasingly dangerous media environment, where journalists have been killed across the region, set an example for other women (Sakr 2007). With the expansion of the media, came the inclusion of increasing numbers of women working in these outlets. Satellite channels certainly employ an increasing number of female workers, and some of them are producing programmes that explore very important, yet sensitive, gender-related topics such as domestic violence, sexual exploitations, polygamy, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and so on, which were considered taboo to discuss until recently. By discussing these matters and others, such as gender equality and self-determination, these shows give women a voice to discuss the issues that frame their lives to a great extent. In these programmes, female experts, professionals and commentators are invited to debate these important gender-related topics. In many cases viewers are allowed to contact the show via telephone, Skype or email to ask questions, or use social media platforms such as Facebook to comment on the debates. This has allowed women to comment on very sensitive issues, in many cases anonymously to avoid the possible repercussions of their comments. This is very important in achieving gender equality as "[a] big part of empowering women lies in ensuring that they have the means through the media to express their own opinions about inequalities on their own behalf" (Sakr 2004: 7).

In societies where the narrative of 'emphasised femininity' presents women as feeble

beings, women's success in the media environment was a message to women as well as men to believe in women's capabilities and potential equality with men. In some cases, the presence of women as producers and editors has resulted in an increase in the number of women appearing as guests and contributors. Although conservative sections of society prefer gender-related matters to be dealt with through less visible traditional channels, the publicity of matters such as domestic violence, rape, and self-determination on satellite TV, with women talking about women's experiences, has helped break the taboo around these matters and catch the attention of the public, encouraging more women to discuss these matters. Magazines and periodicals that were concerned with the 'women question' started raising these issues years ago, but their scope was much more limited than at the present time. The nature of the outlet and the fact that it was only used by a limited section of the population, due to high rates of illiteracy, especially among women in the MENA, limited their reach. New media technologies, however, provided an environment where a wider swathe of the population was now able to not only receive these messages, but also participate in the ongoing process of their production. It should also be noted that other socio-political and economic developments, such as the increase in women's literacy in recent decades, in some countries in the region has also helped to increase the audiences for these programmes. These types of shows have, however, faced problems, and some of them have been taken off air due to a lack of interest from the audience, who prefer more glamorous talk shows rather than serious shows. As a result, in some cases, TV channels have created women-related talk-shows that are closer to a 'chatfest' among a group of women who have already gained some fame in the media in an attempt to attract more viewers (Sakr 2007). Over the past two decades, women's access to media as the audience and their roles in media as professionals have increased, resulting in a more balanced representation in the media. One aspect, however, needs to be considered carefully. As the

increasing presence of women in media in the MENA is not matched with women's presence in other spheres of society, this media presence "could actually have the effect of masking women's absence from other positions" (Sakr 2007: 106).

Nevertheless, media professionals are not the only group who have been able to capitalise on the expansion of media in the region. By using media technologies, women's movements have also been able to challenge patriarchal norms by devising creative initiatives to increase women's presence in the public sphere (Skalli 2006). The internet in particular provides a cheap platform for women's movements to communicate, publish content, whether in the form of articles and statements, or activities such as demonstrations and workshops, and videotapes uploaded onto websites such as YouTube and shared on social media platforms such as Facebook. This makes the content available to women for free and with relative ease.

The limited literature on media and gender in MENA shows that women (including, but not limited to, women's rights activists and female journalists and media professionals) have been successfully using new media technologies to fight for gender equality. They have been raising awareness around gender-based injustices in their societies, encouraging women to be more active in the defence of their rights, while equally encouraging men to realise the injustices that occur due to male privilege. Women have used media, old and new, as the vehicle to put pressure on governments to tackle gender inequality (Sreberny and Khiabany 2004). Female media workers have been defying the patriarchal boundaries that limit women's presence in public spaces to make their voices heard. This is a fight for the public sphere.

However, the private sphere is not less important. This is an area that has been even less explored in MENA and particularly Iraq. Domestic environments are a very important site for patriarchy. In this research, therefore, the question of media and gender in Iraq is



extended to the private sphere to see if and how women's media consumption and use are helping to change gender relations in post-Saddam Iraq. This is an interesting and equally important area to look at, because "the media provide an interface between the private and public spheres, through which the categories of public and private can be contested" (Sakr 2004: 13). Also, it is important because gender and culture is an important element of Iraqi cultural identity that is viewed as being under threat from Western/Westernised media. The opening up of the post-Saddam media environment brought with it a variety of media content to Iraqi homes. Satellite TV, as a very popular and commonly used technology, has played a huge role in this environment. However, the internet with its increasingly privatised nature and unique capabilities is also important in introducing a wide variety of ideologies and pictures into homes, while enabling communication between people in a variety of ways. "[T]he very fact that broadcast media recognize no boundaries and can pass through borders, means that within private space women can increasingly access a range of images and information, to be viewed together or alone, to be reacted to or acted upon" (Sreberny 2005: 64). This is also true for the internet. The goal of this project is to explore this dimension, to see how media is used and how media content is consumed by women, as well as what the implications of this usage and consumption are for gender relations. How Iraqi cultural identity is in play when women's access to media post-2003 is considered, as the abrupt opening up of the media environment post-2003 is seen as a threat to Iraqi cultural identity. This is because the sexualised content and feminist ideologies mediated through satellite TV and the internet present an alternative to what is seen as the traditional gender culture. To put it simply, there is a sentiment that states that the media is changing women and causing them to adopt Western lifestyles. It will be argued that while media has indeed provided Iraqi women with alternative ideas about gender relations, and has also provided them with tools that enable them to partially bypass boundaries set by their male kin, this does not mean

that Iraqi women have embraced them or that Iraqi gender relations have been transformed as a result. Iraqi gender relations are rooted and promoted by what are perceived as the traditional values of society- values that are respected widely by men as well as women. Embracing these alternatives, which are portrayed in the media, means deviating from the values that form part of the Iraqi people's morality, perceived as rendering them immoral. Additionally, the local 'realities' of the power balance give men the power to sustain patriarchy, mainly through controlling women's sexuality. Simply being exposed to the media does not eliminate these power relations. On the contrary, as men see these alternative narratives as being available to their female kin, they may resort to their traditional gender relations even more so for fear of losing control over women. To explore these areas, this research will investigate the questions set out in the next section.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

Based on what has been explained above, the overarching question in this thesis is:

1. What is the nature of the evolving relationship between media and gender culture in post-Saddam Iraq? The relationship between media and gender is multidimensional. On the one hand, "[t]he media are clearly instruments of modernity" (Sreberny 2005: 66), but on the other hand, Iraqi gender relations are greatly shaped by tradition. Media "can be harnessed for traditionalist purposes, used both to redefine and maintain tradition as well as to destabilize it" (ibid), but at the same time it introduces modern ideology, including those pertinent to gender relations. The dimensions of tradition and modernity, therefore, are key to understanding the relationship between media and gender in Iraq. This brings us to the second question: 2. How has tradition and modernity shaped Iraqi society? Then the next question is an attempt to understand the exact ways in which traditions and modern ideas have shaped gender culture in Iraq: 3. What factors have shaped gender relations in Iraq

since the overthrow of Saddam? Media consumption and use is a social activity and happens within the existing social dynamics. One of these social dynamics is gender relations. The next three questions are aimed at media consumption and its use in a gendered environment: 4. How is media used and/or consumed in gendered domestic environments in Iraq? 5. What role does cultural identity play in this process? In this research, a question that is frequently asked in academic research on gender and media in MENA will also be asked: 6. Has media helped women achieve gender equality? This area will be addressed with regard to post-Saddam Iraq.

In order to find answers to these questions, an intentional effort will be made to avoid a media-centric approach. An attempt will be made to try to present a “thick description of internal processes” (Sreberny 2005: 55), while explaining the external forces.

#### **1.4 Research Rationale**

It is important to note that war, destruction, lawlessness and the resurgence of conservative ideologies are not the only stories in post-Saddam Iraq. Most of the literature on Iraq in the post-Saddam era, including gender studies, has focused on war and its consequences. No doubt the 2003 war has changed many aspects of Iraqi society, many for the worse, and therefore it is justifiable to focus on this very important development to try and understand Iraqi society. I argue, however, that there are other very important aspects of post-2003 Iraq that require attention as well and that overemphasising the impact of war at the cost of ignoring the internal processes and cultural contexts is a reductionist approach. Also, important developments happened ‘on the margin of’ all the war and destruction, and hence attracted less attention. These are important transformations that can potentially change many aspects of society, including gender dynamics. For example, in the realm of gender relations, women’s quota in the parliament and the local councils has helped a generation of

female politicians to grow in Iraq. This is a phenomenon that is happening for the first time in the history of this country. Another important post-2003 development worthy of attention is the rise of a middle class stratum. In the late 1980s, Iraq's economy was in a dire situation after eight years of war with Iran. The occupation of Kuwait and the subsequent war and sanctions completely devastated the Iraqi economy, bringing millions of Iraqis to abject poverty (Al-Ali 2007). As shown in Chapter Three, the country's revenue has seen great increase since 2003. Rampant corruption, mismanagement and continuous war and conflict hindered full scale economic development and, as a result, millions of Iraqis still live in poverty. Yet a large section of the society has benefited from the increase in government revenues. This is a development that may have consequences for gender relations in the country. Another development is the large scale migration that has occurred since 2003. The security situation and the insatiability of the country pushed millions of Iraqis to leave their country, expanding the already large Iraqi diaspora in the neighbouring country, but equally in Europe and North America. Such a diaspora inevitably introduces new cultural norms to the country, especially at a time when the internet facilitates the connection between people in different countries. The third important development that occurred as a result of the regime change in 2003 was the proliferation of the media in Iraq. This thesis focuses on this important development that has been largely ignored in all the noise around the war in Iraq. While acknowledging the impact of war at different levels, this thesis pays attention to cultural contexts in which media is used and consumed.

### **1.5 Orientalism and Studying MENA**

It is always difficult to discuss social life in MENA and avoid the question of orientalism. I am not a Western citizen. I am from the country that I am studying, although I lived there only for the first two years of my life. I grew up in the neighbouring country, Iran. I am,

however, studying at a British institution, researching in English. I am also not sure if I am writing this thesis for the West. When I embarked on this project, I never thought that I would be writing for a Western audience. The main issue for me was to find answers to my questions. Some academics believe that “[as] long as we are writing for the West about ‘the other’, we are implicated in projects that establish Western authority and cultural difference” (Abu-Lughod 2001 :105). ‘The other’ is the key concept here. Am I writing about ‘the other’ or about ‘my people’? Who are us and them? Are we here talking about the West and the rest? I was raised in a society under an Islamic theocracy. I was taught using heavily Islamic materials both in school and at other institutions such as the mosque. The media content I was exposed to was also heavily Islamic. The society was greatly respectful of Islamic values. But at the same time, I grew up in a society with increasing urbanisation and literacy; within a developing economy with increasing speciality and division of labour; increasing individualism and heavy exposure to Western media. Am I a ‘product’ of the West, or the ‘authentic’ culture of MENA? To what extent is it possible to talk about the West and the rest in an increasingly globalised world? Another angle in this complicated network of concepts is discourse. As a researcher at a Western university, heavily drawing upon ideas and theories developed in the West, am I relying on Western discourses to explain a non-Western society? Or does the fact that I am bringing my own experience as someone from an Iraqi family who lived in Iran means that my research is ‘original’? When I am talking about gender relations, am I talking about values that I was socialised to respect and abide by? I know too well the consequences of ignoring these values in those societies. Additionally, I draw on interviews with people, the great majority of whom have never lived in the West and never learnt a Western language. Am I here falling into the trap of explaining social phenomena of an Eastern society, using a Western discourse that serves the unequal power-relations as a residue of the colonial era? These are surely very important questions,

which it is very difficult to find clear answers to. But for me, what is more important is what value system I, as a researcher, believe in. This is especially important when the research is about an issue deeply entangled with moral values, such as gender and sexuality. My value system will greatly shape my perspective on gender equality. If I, as a researcher, am a believer in the literal meaning of Islamic texts and think that Islam provides humans with the best guidance for happiness in this life and salvation in the afterlife, as millions of Muslims do, then I would agree that in some cases, determined by the Quran, a man is allowed to beat his wife. It is quite possible, then, that would I argue that gender equality is a human-made concept, that will ruin lives and families, rather than bringing them happiness. If on the other hand, I am a believer in Islam, but not in the literal meaning of its texts, like many Islamic feminists, I would try to find an explanation that is compatible with my understanding of gender equality and explain the verse in the Quran that talks about men beating their wives. But can this gender equality be the same as the understanding of a secular, supposedly Westernised person about gender equality? These positions will certainly alter the conclusions of any research into gender in MENA. The question here will be: is the researcher not Eastern because he believes in a version of gender equality that is mainly promoted by Western scholars and activists? Is he contributing to the discourse that helps consolidate Western supremacy by presenting Eastern religious values as being against gender equality and therefore inhumane?

Having these complexities in mind in this research, an attempt will be made to avoid any stereotypical representation of people of Iraq. In order to achieve this goal, the richness of sociological studies in the West (many of them carried out by researchers originally from the region) will be brought together with the richness of the participants' perspectives. An awareness of orientalist discourses will be maintained, with an attempt to exclude them from this research, bearing in mind that avoiding these discourses cannot be an excuse for shying

away from offering a critique of the local culture. In doing so, the complexities of gender relations in Iraq will be considered, and the flexibility and the fluidity of the concepts and values that form them. In addition, the diversity among Iraqi women and their agency will be appreciated, while always bearing in mind the structural restraints that limit their movement towards achieving equality.

## **1.6 Summary of the Thesis' Chapters**

In the rest of this thesis, the themes explored in this Introduction will be further developed. In Chapter Two, tradition and modernity in Iraq will be investigated, starting with reviewing the literature on modernity. It will then move on to give a historical overview of the processes of the creation of the Iraqi state and the struggle to determine the identity of the country. Through these processes the country has been exposed to modern ideas such as the nation state, nationalism, Marxism, and so on. Next, an account of the modern forces in Iraq will be provided, but mainly focusing on old-established traditional institutions in the country. Tribal and religious institutions yield a great deal of influence in Iraq. This chapter will unravel their power structure and explain in what manner they shape social life in Iraq. It will be argued that the simplistic dichotomy of tradition vs. modernity is not suitable for explaining Iraqi society, as both traditional and modern forces live alongside each other, creating a hybrid context. Chapter Three will focus on the media and globalisation. It will start with an overview of the literature on globalisation, before positioning post-Saddam Iraq in this globalising world. It will discuss the communication dimension of globalisation, putting the Iraqi media environment into the global context. It then moves to explore media environment in MENA. Chapter Four will shed light on gender relations in Iraq. It will provide a theoretical account of gender and patriarchy, particularly focusing on important patriarchal sites. It will then move on to explain the historical developments that have shaped

patriarchal structures in the region. It will give a historical account of the developments in gender relations since the establishment of modern Iraq in 1921. This section will focus in particular on gender relations in post-Saddam Iraq to explain how the opposing forces that were introduced to the country, as a result of war, shaped gender relations. In this chapter I argue that sexuality is the most important area of Iraqi patriarchy. I also argue that sexual honour is a hegemonic masculine system that works with other concepts and sites to sustain patriarchy. Unlike much of the research on sexual honour in MENA, I do not see violence as the most important dimension of sexual honour. I argue that this masculine hegemonic system relies on a variety of concepts and strategies to sustain patriarchy; these include the threat of violence, violence itself, and importantly, persuasion. A much ignored concept (*'ghira'*, often translated as 'jealousy') will be introduced- a concept closely tied to honour in sustaining patriarchy. It will be explained in detail how hegemonic masculinity plays a vital role in constraining women's sexual agency, and ultimately their agency in many other aspects of life, before moving on to show how other sites of patriarchy, such as violence, culture and state, work alongside sexuality to sustain patriarchy.

My approach to the research is explicated in Chapter Five, where the methodology and the methods employed throughout the various stages of the research process are discussed. The aim of this chapter is to clarify the approach to qualitative research used, and it will argue that is a suitable method for media studies. Using data from the interviews, Chapters Six and Seven will focus on media use and consumption in post-Saddam Iraq. Chapter Six will show how media has become an integral part of people's everyday lives, as Iraqi people embrace media technologies. It will be seen, however that the sexual content available in the media is usually rejected by Iraqis. This content is seen as damaging to Iraqi cultural identity as it is harmful to women. It will also be noted how messages that are sent through TV shows that focus on "women's questions", and also through entertainment shows, are seen as



encouraging women to enjoy agency and self-determination, and how they are a source of conflict. Additionally, the internet's ability to facilitate women circumventing the limitations set by their male kin is seen as a threat to gender culture. Due to the wide-spread sexual double standards that limit women's sexual agency, more so than men's, the main concern is about women's media consumption and use which has a sexual dimension to it. This is in line with the notion of Iraqi gender relations explained in Chapter Four. The last section of Chapter Six will provide evidence that illustrates how many of the values that Iraqi patriarchy draws upon are shared by Iraqi women as well. These are values that form the Iraqi identity revered by Iraqi men and women. This is why many Iraqi women reject the sexual content of what they call Western or Westernised shows, and also feminist values emphasising female agency and self-determination. I argue that this helps Iraqi patriarchy to successfully resort to one of the best strategies to sustain men's dominance over women, and that is persuasion.

Chapter Seven will discuss how Iraqi men respond to the 'threat' of the media. It will show how in a media environment that is 'threatening', their prerogative is to control women's bodies, and in the absence of any government policy to mitigate this 'harm', men resort to their honour-based values and 'rights' to protect their cultural values. They try to domesticate the media to adapt it to the traditional cultural values of gender relations. In this regard, they use several strategies to ensure women are not exposed to sexual content that is seen as corrosive to their cultural values. I will then go on to demonstrate that media domestication implemented by men is not necessarily successful, and that Iraqi women resist it by bypassing the boundaries set by men to consume and use media. The data shows that this resistance is a source of conflict between men and women in Iraq. In these cases, men may resort to violence to sustain their control over women, although violence is usually the last strategy that men turn too. Women are complicit in maintaining patriarchy and,

therefore, men typically use persuasion as a less costly strategy to maintain their privileges.

## **Chapter 2: Modernity and Tradition in Iraq**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The modernity-tradition dichotomy has always been an important element in social enquiry. The birth of modern sociology is seen as an academic attempt to respond to the challenges of modernity that were emerging in parts of Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The processes of modernity, however, did not unfold only in Europe, as they are intrinsically global. Other parts of the world sooner or later were exposed to and influenced by modern currents and developments. Many of these non-European societies, such as societies of the MENA, were traditional societies that did not experience the types of developments that took place in Europe and that led to the advent of modernity. This, however, did not prevent them from being exposed to modern forces at social, political and economic levels. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and especially after the British occupation of the regions that later comprised modern Iraq during the First World War, Iraq has experienced a situation where traditional forces exist alongside modern ones. The traditional institutions in the country were so influential that the British Empire had to recognise them and negotiate its plans with them, and in some cases give them especial powers to rule their areas. Since those days, Iraq, like other countries around the world, has witnessed colossal developments, many of which helped modernise different sectors of the country. This has led to a struggle over the identity of the nation that is still ongoing. Since the time of the establishment of Iraq, various regimes have tried to impose what they see as the true identity of Iraq. Communist, socialist, nationalistic, pan-Arab, Islamic with various strands, or a combination of these ideologies, were adopted and promoted by these regimes who all claimed that they planned to modernise the country. Moreover, almost a century later, the occupation forces led by the US had to respect the same traditional institutions and once again negotiate deals with them in order to achieve its

goal in Iraq. As an important aspect of this research is about gender, and since gender is an extremely sensitive issue that is very important for traditional forces in Iraq, it is inevitable that an investigation of Iraqi society should start by introducing its traditional institutions and forces. However, it is not possible to explore Iraq without considering its modern institutions or its links with modern processes such as globalisation. In order to understand contemporary Iraqi society, it is crucial to realise that although modern institutions are able to exert great influence, they are not the only preponderate force, as powerful traditional institutions rival those of the state. Therefore, this chapter will explain the dynamic between traditional and modern institutions in post-Saddam Iraq.

In this chapter, it will be argued that Iraq has experienced a hybrid status where both traditional and modern forces co-exist together. They work together, they influence each other and, in some cases such as the lawlessness of the post-Saddam era, they eclipse each other. Different aspects of these modernising processes will be discussed, including ‘the beginning’ of modernity, what constitutes modernity, and whether the idea of modernities is a more appropriate concept for explaining the developments that have taken place in different parts of the world, including Iraq. The chapter will then proceed to shed light on the influential traditional institutions in Iraq and the way they function. Their role in Iraqi society will be discussed in detail, and how they shape different aspects of the society. First, aspects of the influential Najaf Seminary, one of the two most prominent Shia Seminaries in the world, will be illustrated, along with clarifying the basis according to which clerics are considered the legitimate traditional authority and are followed by millions of people in Iraq. Then, the second most influential traditional institution in Iraq will be addressed, namely the tribe, as the majority of Iraqi people have ties with tribes in one way or other. Tribal customs shape people’s lives in a variety of manners, and tribal chiefs are widely respected and able to exert great influence in all aspects of life in Iraq. In this section, the importance of the

tribe in Iraqi people's daily lives will be highlighted. In order to so, there will be a particular focus on the role the tribe plays as a customary judicial authority, rivalling the modern state courts.

## **2.2 Modernity**

"...modernity" refers to modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence" (Giddens 2013: 1). It was not until the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century that modernity was given a clear formulation. In this era "modernity became identified with industrialism and the sweeping social, economic and cultural changes associated with it" (Hall *et al.* 1993: 2) and modern institutions were consolidated (Giddens and Pierson 1998). It has been extremely difficult to define exactly the characteristics of modern societies. Modernity theory has been given on a basic distinction from tradition; "it relies on a basic distinction between these [modern] social formations and 'traditional' societies" (Wagner 2003: 3). In this sense, it is implied that a 'rupture' has taken place that separates the modern era from the pre-modern or traditional times. However, it is very difficult to show exactly when modern societies of Europe actually broke with traditional social formations, especially as large sectors of European societies did not experience modernity well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The same is true about other modern nations that followed suit.

A number of different historical processes, along with unique historical circumstances, gave birth to modernity. These processes were multidimensional, touching different aspects of society. On the political level, they meant the decline of the transcendental order and the rise of the secular polity, preponderance of bureaucratic authority through which rulers who were elevated to their position through the enactment of rational rules, regulations, statuses,

and laws are given legitimacy (Weber in Kalberg 2005). The rise of the nation-state and an international system of states amongst other developments are considered to be important processes that are associated with modernity. The emergence of a global dynamic and expansionist capitalist economic order based on private property with high levels of specialisation and advanced division of labour (Durkheim 1984) was the main process that took place on the economic level. The formation of classes, the rise of individualism, the growth of extensive administrative and bureaucratic systems of social organisation and regulation; the growth of materialist, rationalist and individualist cultural values; a shift from a religious to a secular culture, and also advanced sexual and social division of labour, happened in social and cultural life (Eisenstadt 1973; Hall *et al.* 1993). Another salient feature of modernity is its intrinsically globalising quality (Giddens, 2013). Globalisation is a process that started in the early stages of modernity, and it “continues to shape and reshape politics, economics and culture, at an accelerated pace and scale” (Hall *et al.* 1993: 4). This is an important characteristic of modernity that will be covered in detail in Chapter Three.

Classic modernisation theory was centred on the idea of modernity as it developed in Europe, and the basic institutional constellations that appeared there would eventually prevail around the world. Marx, for example, famously stated: “the country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future” (Marx 1954: 19 cited in Harrison 2003: 2). Emile Durkheim’s social solidarity theory in which the ‘mechanical solidarity’ of traditional societies gives way to the ‘organic solidarity’ in modern societies with a highly specialised division of labour (Durkheim 1984) can also be placed in this category. It seems that this version of modernisation theory is no longer very appealing in sociological circles, not least because subsequent research and events have proven the linear, inevitable, irreversible version of modernisation theory to be problematic.

This approach to the modernity thesis has also been critiqued by academics who see it

as Western-centric. They believe that although some general structural differentiations in social institutions took place in modern societies, in the structure of the family; economic and political structures; the introduction of mass communications; modern education systems; urbanisation, and the emergence of an individualist identity of people, different societies took different paths towards defining and organising these institutions. This viewpoint challenges the idea of modernity that is based on a “basic distinction between the social formations of ‘the West’ and ‘traditional’ or ‘pre-modern’ societies” (Bhambra 2007: 3).

As a result, this line of thought considers modernity not to be equal to Westernisation, and that we cannot talk about modernity; rather, we need to consider multiple modernities that evolved and are evolving in different parts of the world, each with its distinct characteristics (Eisenstadt 2000). These modernities that have appeared outside the West cannot be understood through concepts developed to understand Western modernity. In particular, they do not converge with modern Western institutional structures.

East Asian sociologists have been particularly successful in shaping an alternative sociology of modernity. They argue that “modern Asian societies cannot be seen as ‘post-traditional’, since modernization co-exists with the desire to retain ‘traditional self-identities in distinction from the modern West’” (Jackson *et al.* 2013: 669). Therefore, modernity is negotiated at a local level.

The relationship between tradition and modernity in non-Western modernising nations is not necessarily similar to the experiences of the West. For example, “East Asian modernity has been built on a different history, with different cultures and traditions and also a different relationship between tradition and modernity” (Jackson *et al.* 2008: 6). It can be argued that the East followed the path take by the West in the modernising process. Yet, in order to preserve a distinct identity in relation to the West, it incorporated its tradition in modernity

and vice versa. This emphasis on a local distinction from the West is an important theme in this thesis, as Iraqis show an interest in modernising their society, while retaining their own ‘traditions’ and identity and integrating them with modern ideas. Due to the important place that tradition retains in the East, these societies cannot be characterised as post-traditional; rather there is a ““complex self-reflexive endeavour to position oneself [*sic*] for *and* against “European modernity” and “indigenous tradition”” (Tanabe and Tokito-Tanabe 2003: 4, cited in Jackson *et al.* 2008: 6, *Italic in original*).

Other scholars have also critiqued the idea of western modernity as endogenous to Europe; the idea that Europe is the ‘birthplace’ of modernity, from which travelled to other parts of the world. The problem with this thesis, it is argued, is that it does not consider the continuity of knowledge and ideas and presents Europe as an isolated part of the world, that was never in touch with, and hence influenced by, other civilisations. As Jackson argues “modernity itself is a product of historical interconnections between regions and nations rather than something that was originally endogenously European” (2015: 5).

To emphasise the European origins of modernity is to ignore all the achievements of other civilisations that helped give rise to European modernity. The historical lands of contemporary Iraq, for example, introduced various human achievements in a variety of fields, from philosophy to mathematics, that was later used by European thinkers and scientists in further developing ideas, many of which are connected to European modernity (Falagas *et al.* 2006).

The situation in Europe or East Asia, however, does not necessarily explain the situation in Iraq in terms of modernity. In Iraq, as will be seen in the next section, the story is completely different, since modern features live alongside traditional qualities in a hybrid manner that gives Iraq its unique condition.



### 2.3 Contemporary Iraq

The Iraqi state came into existence in 1921. But unlike the modern nation states of Europe, its creation was not “forged by myriad contingent events from the loosely scattered order of post-feudal kingdoms and principalities” (Giddens 2013: 62) but rather by the disintegration of the three Ottoman *Wilayas* (provinces) of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul, at the hands of the British and French Empires, and the creation of a new nation-state out of these provinces (Sluglett 2007). There was little modern about Iraq before its creation. Some limited modern ideas were introduced to regions that later constituted Iraq in the late Ottoman era. During the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the rulers in Istanbul were convinced that their inefficient manner of dealing with Europe was due to the lack of central power in the empire, and that they needed a series of reforms to consolidate their power and to integrate the non-Muslim and non-Turkish populations of the empire into Ottoman society. Between 1839 and 1876 these reforms, called *Tanzimat* (regulations), were introduced. The *Tanzimat* era is seen as an era of European modernity’s influence on the Ottoman Empire (Fattah 2009). “The principal aim of the reforms was to reassert the rights of the central government and to draw the provinces more closely under the control of the Imperial authorities” (Sluglett 2007: 164). Although these reforms were multidimensional, the main focus of *Tanzimat* was on modernising the military. In Iraq, conscription was introduced, though very limited in scope. It is estimated that by 1912, 1200 Iraqi officers were serving in the Ottoman army. During this period, a number of missionary schools were opened, delivering a broader curriculum that had strong emphasis on science, math and languages (Abdullah 2003). Printing press entered the country in 1860, and the steamship reduced the Baghdad-Basra return trip from one month to 10 days. In 1861, telegraph connected Baghdad to Istanbul. Some reform regarding bureaucracy and land ownership was carried out too. One of the goals of these reforms was to settle the nomadic tribes of Iraq. By the end of First World War, tribes were

an important segment of Iraqi society, especially in rural areas where 80% of the population lived. Modern industry was almost non-existent and the illiteracy rate was around 95% (Abdullah 2003). In general, Iraq was living in pre-modern conditions before the occupation of Iraq by the British Empire. This is when the first serious encounter with modernity in Iraq took place- when the British created a nation-state.

### **2.3.1 Iraq: The Nation-State**

Modern Iraq comprises roughly of the area that was historically called Mesopotamia. For centuries, different people migrated and/or invaded and settled in this region; from the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, Greeks, Assyrians and Persians through to Arabs, Mongols, Turks and the British. However, the impact of the Arab invasion in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century has had a lasting print on the identity of the people of modern Iraq, for it brought with it the Arabic language and the religion of Islam and tribal norms, which until the present time have constituted important characteristics of the socio-political and cultural constitution of this country (Abdullah 2003). Additionally, four centuries of Ottoman rule in Iraq had a great impact on the shape of the new Iraq that was created by the victorious allies after the First World War. Also important is the influence of the British Empire and its legacy in establishing modern institutions in Iraq.

Although the name Iraq has been used to refer to different regions during different historical periods (Abdullah 2003), the term was used to name this modern country created in 1921. According to the best available estimate, the population of Iraq at the end of the First World War was between 2.5 and 3 million. 75-80% was Arab, with Kurds the biggest minority in the newly established nation state. Islam was the dominant religion. Around ninety percent of the population were Muslim, from which 55% were Shia. Tribes formed an important segment of the society, especially in rural areas, where 80% of population lived.

In 1915 and during the First World War, the British Empire encouraged Sharif of Mecca<sup>2</sup> to prompt a rebellion in the Arab lands<sup>3</sup> that were at the time under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. In return for this rebellion, an independent Arab state in Arabia and the Fertile Crescent<sup>4</sup> was pledged to the Sharif of Mecca. Whether this was supposed to be a unified Arab country covering all these territories or several Arab nation-states, is not clear.

At the same time that the British were negotiating with the Arabs to help them organise the rebellion, the British negotiator, Sir Mark Sykes, was holding talks with the French representative, François Georges-Picot, on dividing Arab lands amongst themselves in the event of an Ottoman defeat. These negotiations, which took place between November 1915 and March 1916, resulted in the Sykes–Picot Agreement. According to this treaty, territories that comprise today's Syria, Lebanon and Mosul would be under French control. Equally, Baghdad, Basra and the territory stretching from this region to Palestine would be controlled by the British. Before these talks, British forces were already present in Basra (south of modern Iraq). When the Ottoman Empire decided to join the Central Powers in 1914, the British Empire decided to mobilise its forces in Basra to protect its communication routes and oil fields at the head of the Persian Gulf. By the end of the First World War, the British army had occupied most of the territories that constitute modern-day Iraq, including the three main cities of the region, Basra in the south, Baghdad in the middle and Mosul in the north (Marr 2012).

In April 1920, the newly established League of Nations gathered at the San Remo Conference<sup>5</sup> and decided that the Fertile Crescent should be divided into several countries.

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<sup>2</sup> Sharif of Mecca was the steward of the Islamic holy cities of Mecca and Medina. These two cities are located in modern Saudi Arabia.

<sup>3</sup> The term Arab land is opposed by some non-Arab minorities living in dominantly Arab countries such as Kurds in Iraq. This term is used in this thesis only to describe countries with an Arab majority population, and does not bear any ideological connotation.

<sup>4</sup> A region consisted of modern Iraq, Kuwait, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Palestine, and some parts of Egypt.

<sup>5</sup> The San Remo conference was an international meeting of the post-World War I Allied Supreme Council, held at Villa Devachan in Sanremo, Italy, from 19 to 26 April 1920.

France gave up its claim on Mosul that was promised in the Sykes–Picot Agreement. Therefore, a new nation-state, Iraq, comprising of the three Ottoman provinces of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul was born under the British mandate, with a promise that Iraq will eventually achieve independence (Abdullah 2003).

The promise of independence in an undetermined future was not welcomed in Iraq, and the declaration of the San Remo Conference was widely denounced. In fact, this event gave momentum to the ever-increasing opposition to British rule in Iraq. In June 1920, a revolt broke out. The rebellion, a sign of new Iraqi identity and nationalism, lasted for three months, and affected all regions of Iraq and included Sunnis and Shias, urban and rural, Arabs and Kurds. Although this revolt was suppressed after the British used Air Force and other heavy weapons, and it did not succeed in expelling the occupiers, it did change British policy towards Iraq. It persuaded them to give away more power to the indigenous people of the region and was a blow to the Indian style of direct rule over Iraq implemented for some years (Abdullah 2003). As a result, the British high commissioner in Baghdad, Sir Percy Cox, set up an interim government and appointed Sayyid Abdul-Rahman al-Gaylani as its leader.

In 1921 at the Cairo Conference<sup>6</sup> the shape and identity of this new nation-state became clearer, and it was decided that a constitutional monarchy would be established in Iraq. In August 1921, Faisal, the third son of the Sharif of Mecca was appointed as the first king of modern Iraq. A new nation-state was born and the mandate was granted to Britain by the League of Nations (Marr 2012). In order to implement the new British policy of indirect rule in Iraq, the British authorities tried hard to keep Iraqi officials' powers in check. This objective was supposed to be achieved through signing a treaty with Iraq that was ratified by the Iraqi Council of Ministers in 1922. The treaty that was to last twenty years, and it

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<sup>6</sup> The 1921 Cairo Conference was convened in order to establish a unified British policy for the Middle East.

demanding that the Iraqi king consider Britain's advice on all matters related to British interests in Iraq's fiscal policy so long as Iraq was in debt to Britain. It also required Iraq to pay half the costs of the British Residency and other costs. In addition to that, Iraq agreed to assign British officials as advisors and inspectors in eighteen departments. The treaty, along with other British policies in Iraq, remained a source of resentment among Iraqi nationalists well throughout the life of the monarchy in Iraq. Iraqi nationalists perceived the new institutions as being a source of foreign interference, dependence and misery of the people of Iraq.

In order to further secure its interests in Iraq, Britain resorted to another policy that was to influence the political as well as social structure of Iraq for years to come. Recognising the influence that tribal leaders enjoyed in these deeply tribal lands, the British authorities in Iraq made sure they had allies among them. For centuries, the Ottoman Empire faced serious challenges in expanding its rule over these areas. At the beginning of the occupation, the British were concerned about imposing order in vast rural areas. By pursuing this policy, they would prevent any assistance to the Ottoman Empire; equally, they could secure supplies for their army. To achieve this objective, they resorted to policies according to which pro-British tribal Sheikhs were given numerous powers in their territories in return for their loyalty to the British administration in Iraq. The Sheikhs were promised support and even arms, if necessary. Additionally, large areas of land were granted to these Sheikhs, creating a Sheikh-landlord stratum that was loyal to the British occupation. After an exhausting war, the British needed to decrease the number of their troops in Iraq and lower the expenditure. Ruling through loyal tribal chiefs was seen as an ideal way of exerting indirect power over a vast territory that was tribal-rural in nature (Efrati 2012). To make this plan work and to manage this alliance, the Tribal Criminal and Civil Disputes Regulation (TCCDR) was issued in 1916, and then reissued with some changes in 1918. In 1924 the

TCCDR became state law (Efrati 2012). TCCDR gave tribal chiefs judicial and administrative powers plus policing rights over their territories. It even gave them the right to collect tax (Abdullah 2003). The TCCDR “placed tribesmen in a separate system of law. It was designed to arrange for the speedy settlement of their civil and criminal dispute in accordance with tribal customs” (Efrati 2012: 21). As a result, citizens of Iraq were divided into two categories with two different legal systems. Rural/tribal people ruled under the TCCDR, and the urban population which was subject to civil and criminal courts, functioning through the Baghdad Penal Code enacted by the British in 1918 (Efrati 2012). The British policy regarding loyal tribal Sheikhs reversed the effects of the modernisation plans underway during the last phase of Ottoman rule, through which the power of tribal Sheikhs was gradually eroded. In addition to that, this policy greatly limited the state’s powers, because it helped the Sheikhs to gain near absolute power in their territories. They also managed to regularly secure parliamentary seats in dubious elections. Ironically, plans to transform the identity of Iraq into a modern nation-state were accompanied by the deepening of the influence of traditional authorities. Iraqi tribes had another source of power that helped them undermine the new Iraqi state, they owned an estimated 100,000 rifles, while the Iraqi government owned only 15000. The British government was reluctant to arm the Iraqi army throughout the years of mandate (Abdullah 2003).

In 1929 the newly elected British labour government announced that it would end the mandate and would support the admission of Iraq into the League of Nations. This actually happened in October 1932. Although this development marked the end of the British mandate in Iraq and ushered in the independence of Iraq, British influence over Iraq remained high until the 1958 coup d’état that overthrew the monarchy. In order for Iraq to achieve its independence, it had to negotiate a new treaty with Britain. In 1930 the Iraqi parliament ratified a new treaty that was to last 25 years. According to this new treaty the

British mandate was abolished; however, Britain retained a right to all Iraqi facilities and kept all British advisors, although they were to leave Iraq eventually. Britain gained the right to veto all foreign policy decisions and a monopoly over training and supplying the Iraqi army. Britain also gained the right to use Iraqi territories in times of war. This essentially ended any possibility of neutrality from the Iraqi side in any future wars. The Royal Air Force was allowed to remain in two bases in Baghdad and Basra (Abdullah 2003).

This treaty was seen as another sign of foreign interference and influence by many Iraqis, especially as it extended the British presence in Iraq for more years to come, and it helped fuel anti-Western, anti-British sentiment in Iraq. This was all going on while nationalist and pan-Arab feelings and movements were growing in many Middle Eastern countries, including Iraq. However, the British backed cabinet led by Nuri al-Sa'id managed to crack down on Iraqi nationalists, which in turn sparked more opposition to the British backed monarchy (Marr 2012). The anti-British resentment was not merely because of patriotic sentiment. The British influence was seen as a force that was impeding the social and economic development of the country through its continuous support of a narrow stratum of the political elite and tribal Sheikhs.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of September 1933, Faisal, the first King of Iraq, died and his 21-year-old son Ghazi assumed the throne. This event led to the diminishing of British influence, as Ghazi was much less willing to heed to British suggestions, not least because he was educated at the Military College and identified more with the nationalist military officers. This, in addition to other events such as the Assyrian revolt in 1933 and its suppression by the Iraqi army, and the sanction of a conscription bill in 1934, added to the increasing power and importance of the army in Iraq. In the three years from 1933 to 1936, the number of men in military service doubled to 23000. At the same time, the Iraqi air-force grew substantially (Marr 2012). After the brutal crackdown of the tribal insurgents of the early

30s by the army, sections of nationalist politicians fostered the sentiment that emphasised the interference of the army in politics. This sentiment was particularly influenced by the initial success of fascist regimes in Italy and Germany in bringing social and economic reforms, as well as social mobilisation, and it was supported by an increased sense of Iraqi-ness in the country. Mustafa Kamal's regime in Turkey was a source of inspiration amongst sections of Arab nationalists.

The first major interference of the Iraqi army in politics happened in 1936. After the Prime Minister Hashimi showed some dictatorial tendencies and hinted at prolonging his term of office, the army took over (Marr 2012). On the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 1936, the army demanded the resignation of the Prime Minister Hashimi and as a result a reformist cabinet was formed. The new government, which removed most conservative and Arab nationalist politicians, was short-lived, as the resentment from different sectors of society, particularly that of Sheikhs-landlords and conservative pan-Arab politicians, grew. Ten months after the coup, Bakr Sidqi the main military figure behind the coup was assassinated by a soldier affiliated with the Arab nationalists. This short-lived coup was unsuccessful in fulfilling its promises, including a more Iraqi oriented policy, as opposed to an Arab oriented policy. It also failed to abolish the discriminatory laws that affected the peasants. However, this coup was a turning point in the history of modern Iraq, since it gave way to a series of military interventions in politics that greatly shaped Iraqi politics for decades to come.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1939, Ghazi King of Iraq died in a car accident and was survived by a two-year-old son. His cousin Abd al-Ilah was appointed as regent. Abd al-Ilah had a good relationship with the British, therefore they backed his appointment. During this time, Arab nationalism was on the rise in Iraq. International events such as the partition of Palestine and the rise of fascist groups in Europe helped intensify this sentiment. Additionally, inspired by the interference of the Army in political life in neighbouring



countries, a new generation of young army officers saw the role of the military as a crucial one in the development of the country. During this period, several silent coups succeeded in changing several government cabinets without much bloodshed (Marr 2012).

During the Second World War, the Iraqi government was shaky and unstable. The pro-British regent Abd al-Ilah and Prime-minister Nuri faced huge challenges from the increasing power and popularity of the anti-British nationalist forces who were supporting Nazi Germany as a way to counter the British. These conflicts prompted several cabinet resignation and bloodless coups, and eventually led to the second British occupation in 1941. When the all-nationalist government ousted the pro-British regent, the British army landed in Basra. The British army attacked the Iraqi Air Force without warning on second of May and entered Baghdad on the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 1941 (Tripp 2001). Four nationalist army officers who, along with some other politicians were the main figures behind the resurgence of nationalism in Iraqi politics, fled to Iran. The pro-British regent was brought back to power and a completely pro-British cabinet was formed (Marr 2012).

The crackdown on the Arab nationalists was accompanied by the opening up the space for leftists during and shortly after the Second World War. Communist newspapers, which used to be published underground, were now published and distributed more freely. These developments offered an opportunity for the left-wing groups to reach out to the intellectual circles, as well as the working class in Iraq (Marr 2012). Although the Communist Party was not licensed, it was at the time the best-organised political party in Iraq. It mainly appealed to middle class educated people, Shias, as well as the Jewish and Christian minorities.

In 1947, negotiations between Iraq and Britain started in order to amend the 1930 Treaty. It concluded that Iraq would have control over its Air Force bases; however, the British retained the right to use these bases in the event of war. The treaty was extended to

1973 instead of the previous date of 1957. This triggered major demonstrations. Police cracked down on the protests, leaving tens of casualties.

During the fifties, Iraqi streets were on fire. Many strikes, demonstrations and protests were organised by various groups such as workers and students. Most of these activities were led by the leftists and especially the Communist Party.

The post war period saw the continuous influence of Tribal chiefs in Iraq. They constituted 45% of the members of all post-war parliaments (Marr 2012), showing how the monarchy was reliant on Sheikh-landlords, which created a significant source of resentment amongst many Iraqi strata, particularly the peasants who were still suffering from the ever-increasing power of these Sheik-landlords.

In August 1954, the government started a new round of political suppression. It particularly targeted the left in order to eliminate this important opposition force that was increasingly appealing to the intelligentsia of Iraq. Legislation allowing the Council of Ministers to deport advocates of the Communist Party was passed. This suppression forced the opposition to go underground and become united. In 1957, the main opposition political parties, including the Communist Party, created a unified front called the United National Front. This front included a new small party called the Ba'ath party that later played a huge role in the future of Iraq. This strategy of suppression did not help the government, as the whole regime was toppled in 1958. The Iraqi troops which were supposed to march to Jordan set Baghdad as their destination. They did not only bring down the government but the whole system. This swift coup d'état under the leadership of General Abul Karim Qasim brought an end to the Iraqi monarchy in the early hours of the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 1958 (Marr 2012).

The new regime attempted to create a cabinet that represented the diversity of society in Iraq. It was also divided between military and civilian figures. However, the main power was in the hands of the military characters. Qasim assumed the main posts in the cabinet.

The dominant orientation of the new regime was anti-Western, in particular, anti-British. There was a clear ideological gap amongst the new ruling elite, with one group believing in integration with the Arab world as the way to unite Arabs to face the Western powers, and the other more Iraqi oriented and pushing for an Iraq independent from the West.

Qasim's regime promised a democratic constitution that never materialised. Revolutionary courts, essentially led by Qasim himself, managed to remove his enemies very quickly. Qasim was trying to strengthen his grip on power and by 1961 the cabinet had no civilian members anymore (Marr 2012). Qasim's military dictatorship destroyed the old regime's institutions, which although flawed in many aspects, were starting to take root in the country and to give this new-born nation an identity. Although Qasim's regime was busy removing its enemies and consolidating the 'sole leader's' powers, as well as dealing with several revolts, attempted coups and the attempted assassination of Qasim, it also took swift and dramatic measures to reform the country, some of which are still present in the country until this day. The new regime substantially increased the money spent on education, health and affordable housing for poorer people. Profits from oil were redirected from long-term infrastructure plans to short-term plans such as housing and education, and this was quickly felt by people, especially the poorer population. In health sector, by building more hospitals, the number of hospital beds available increased substantially, although this was not accompanied by an appropriate increase in the number of doctors and teachers (Tripp 2001). Also, the Family Status Law of 1959 improved women's legal status. One of the main reforms of this era was the land reform. The TCCDR was abolished, followed by the introduction of a land reform law that broke down the feudal structure of the countryside and as a result diminished the political, social and economic influence of the Sheikh-landlords.

The increasing frustration of the opposition parties, especially the pan-Arab parties and the Ba'ath party, caused them to believe that the only way to forward their demands would be by assuming power after toppling Qasim. These parties, especially the Ba'ath Party, started to infiltrate important institutions, especially the army, to recruit officers in support of their objectives. The Ba'ath party was a small party that was able to create a clandestine organisation that gained experience in underground activities and mobilising the streets. Its members were mainly young civilians. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 1963, officers loyal to the conspiring parties attacked the airfield at Rashid military base and sent off their own military units to Baghdad to PM's office. The nationalists and Ba'ath party members took to the streets as well. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 1963 Qasim was arrested in his office, tried and summarily shot dead, ending five years of his regime (Tripp 2001).

Shortly after the conspirers assumed power, a cabinet of twenty-one members replaced the ousted regime. Ba'athist figures assumed all key posts. The main power however was in the hands of a newly formed council, called the National Council of the Revolutionary Command (NCRC). This council, which was run by the Ba'athists, had the power to remove cabinets and also assumed the powers of the Commander in Chief of the military. Abd al-Salam Arif, though not a Ba'athist, received the presidency. This post was supposed to be a symbolic one. His Vice-President and the Prime Minister was the Ba'athist Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr. (Tripp 2001).

As soon as the Ba'athists and other Arab nationalists came to power, their differences over the direction in which the country should be heading towards, which were put aside to achieve the common goal of removing Qasim's regime, came to the surface. These differences were evident not only between different parties and political movements, but also amongst different factions within parties themselves. They caused these different groups to clash with each other over power soon after. The parties all, however, agreed on removing

the supporters of the old regime. As a result, many Iraqi Communist Party members and supporters were arrested, brutally tortured and executed (Tripp 2001).

In November 1963, the internal conflicts amongst the leadership of the Ba'ath Party paved the way for Arif and his nationalist supporters in the army to take over. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of November, Arif announced that the army would take control of the country. He gave some posts to the Ba'athist military figures that helped with the coup, but it did not take him long to get rid of them. By early 1964 the Ba'ath party was completely removed from power (Marr 2012).

Now Arif found the opportunity to monopolise power according to his own interests, sharing it only with some Arab nationalist associates (mainly Nasserites<sup>7</sup>) in whom he had trust. In order to deter any possible military coups, President Arif formed an elite military unit, the Republican Guard, under the command of one of his kinsmen from his own tribe, Al-Jumaila. In doing so, he established a trend under which “he openly relied on established systems of patronage, kinship and tribal affiliation to cement the core of his power in the armed forces” (Tripp 2001: 177). This trend remained dominant in Iraqi politics until the end of Saddam's regime in 2003 and beyond. This was despite the fact that all the republic regimes that took over after the overthrow of the monarchy introduced themselves as progressive and modernists. They indeed adopted some formal programmes to marginalise tribes.

Under Arif, relative freedom of speech was allowed. Nasserite elements in the regime pushed for more integration with the Egyptian regime, and this resulted in a preliminary agreement with Nasser to unite the two countries. A provisional constitution was announced on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1964 that promised a future National Assembly. The new constitution

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<sup>7</sup> People who believed in a political ideology based on Jamal Abdel Nasser's (President of Egypt (1956-1970)) thinking.

introduced the identity of the country as democratic, socialist, Arab, and Islamic. The emphasis on Islam was mostly due to the impact of the conservative and religious characteristics of President Arif himself (Marr 2012). It is worth noting, however, that President Arif started another trend in Iraqi politics- trying to return to civil rule in order to curb the power of the military to prevent future coup d'états. (Marr 2012).

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 1966, during a tour of the country, President Arif's helicopter crashed and all the people on board were killed, including President Arif. Soon after, the National Defence Council and the cabinet elected Abd al-Rahman Arif, Abd al-Salam Arif's brother, as the new president. During Arif the second's rule, military power again grew, forcing Arif the second to appoint a cabinet dominated by military figures. This regime, like its predecessors, failed to establish institutions to work as its backbone. Worse of all, the regime was functioning without a parliament. The Arabs' defeat in the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 increased the anti-Western sentiment in Iraq, and increased dissatisfaction with the military rule, mainly because of Iraq's feeble participation in the war. Arif the second's weak character encouraged a range of political groups to think about assuming power, from the Communists to military politicians. However, the Ba'ath Party, which had already lost power once, was better prepared to capture the opportunity to seize power once again. Therefore, the Ba'ath Party conspired with some figures inside Arif's inner circle, and in the early hours of the morning of July the 17<sup>th</sup> 1968, some of the conspiratorial forces occupied the Ministry of Defence and the broadcasting station. At the Republican Palace, Ba'athists' collaborators opened the gates for Ba'athist forces. President Arif surrendered and was sent to exile (Marr 2012).

The first year of the new Ba'ath regime was precarious, but by the mid-1970s the party had succeeded in building the foundations of a totalitarian regime that removed all dissenting voices from the political scene. Soon after the coup, President Bakr was appointed as Prime

Minister and Commander in Chief of the armed forces, and Saddam Hussein became his deputy. The provisional constitution was announced and “declared Islam to be the religion of the state, ‘socialism’ as the foundation of the economy, and the [the Revolutionary Command Council] RCC (and, by extension, its chairman) as the supreme legislative and executive authority” (Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett 2001: 118). Soon after the declaration of the constitution, the regime started a terror campaign against all left and right forces. The scale of terror brought about by the Ba’ath regime was unprecedented. As the anti-Western rhetoric in the country was on the rise, especially after the Arab defeat of 1967, the environment was ripe for a movement that was seen as nationalist.

Relying on rising oil prices, the regime also started a full-scale development programme in a variety of sectors under the rubric of socialism. Free education and healthcare was developing. The regime also had a large scale economic plan and started an industrialisation programme that was especially developing the military industry (Marr 2012). The Iraqi people’s economic status, particularly in urban areas, started to improve, and the GDP per capita was on the rise. By the early 1980s, 75 percent of the Iraqi population were connected to the national grid. Urbanisation intensified, and by 1983, 75 percent of the population was living in cities (Abdullah 2003).

On the other hand, in order to consolidate its power, the Ba’ath regime started building a multi-layered security apparatus, and a police state was in creation. By 1978, 20 percent of all state employees were working within one of the many security forces. By this time, freedom of expression was at its worst status. The only ideology that was accepted was the nationalist, socialist, progressive ideology of the Ba’ath Party- Iraq’s identity was defined by the Ba’ath.

By the end of the 1970s, the distinction between party and government was blurred. Ba’thist indoctrination was applied to the regular army...the school curriculum was changed

to include a strong element of Ba’thist indoctrination emphasizing militancy, a “love for order”, suspicion of “foreigners” and, above all else, loyalty to the regime (Abdullah 2003: 173).

The Ba’athification of the whole society was underway. Since the coup d’etat of 1968, Saddam Hussein had secured his position as one of the most influential figures in the Ba’ath Party and the regime. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of July 1979, President Bakr appeared on Television to announce his resignation, citing health problems. Soon after, Saddam was sworn in as the new President (Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett 2001). Saddam started an extensive purge inside the party to make sure that only people loyal to him were allowed to be in the party. Soon after Saddam took over, the Islamic revolution in Iran shook the whole region. One of the most powerful regimes in the Middle East was toppled and Ayatollah Khomeini, a cleric whose opposition to the Ba’ath regime in Iraq was known, came to power. The already problematic situation between the neighbouring countries escalated and, finally, in September 1980, the Iran-Iraq war started (Marr 2012). This devastating war lasted for eight years during which a variety of socio-political and economic developments happened. During the first years of the war, the regime implemented a policy of ‘guns and butter’ providing both the military needs of the war, but also making sure that the economic status of Iraqi citizens was not adversely affected by the war. It did not take long for the regime to realise that this policy was not sustainable, especially as no end to the war was in sight. Austerity programmes followed, but Liberal policies were also implemented. In fact, the imperative of the war forced the regime to abandon many of its socialist policies. Deregulation of the labour market, privatisation of the agricultural sector, and removing subsidies to various sectors all occurred as a result of the economic pressures that arose due to the heavy costs of the war. By the end of the war in 1988, the Iraqi economy was in a dire situation. In 1988, the year the war ended, Iraq’s foreign debt was between \$100 and \$120



billion dollars (Abdullah 2003). The infrastructures, particularly Iraqi ports and in the oil sector in the south, were also severely damaged.

On the social level, the militarisation of society affected many aspects of people's lives. Government offices, schools and universities, even the health sector, was dragged into the military programmes. The fact that Iran had the upper hand in terms of numbers (because of its bigger population), meant that the regime in Iraq had to force more and more men to go to war. This affected the workforce, which was mainly in the public sector. These vacancies were filled by women (Al-Ali 2007). On the other hand, the regime worked hard to Ba'athify all aspects of society. Ba'ath was imposed as the main identity of people during this period. More and more people were pressurised to join the party. The police state was expanding and tens of thousands of people were recruited as spies. Thousands of dissidents were sent to prison or executed. (Marr 2012).

The Islamic revolution in Iran gave a space for the Shia religious parties and movements to grow. These parties that were marginal during the years of the monarchy and the first republics gradually grew, and the Iranian Islamic regime provided them with the ideology, as well as the logistical support, to expand. During the Iran-Iraq war some of these groups joined the war effort to fight Iraq. These groups formed the backbone of the new regime after Saddam was toppled in 2003.

In 1988, the devastating war finally ended. Iraq was left with a much stronger army but a weaker economy. Iraq badly needed its oil revenue to recover from the war, and saw its neighbours as a hurdle to achieving this goal. Kuwait was particularly seen as a problem after Iraq accused its southern neighbour of draining the shared oilfields. The relations between the two countries deteriorated, and in August 1990 Iraq invaded Kuwait and swiftly occupied the country. The international community and Security Council demanded Iraq withdraw its troops from Kuwait. Iraq did not comply, and so the Security Council adopted

a resolution that put Iraq under economic sanctions. In February 1991, a coalition led by the US expelled Iraqi troops from Kuwait. The Iraqi army was in retreat when a popular uprising in the majority Shia southern provinces and majority Kurd northern provinces started. The regime lost control of several provinces and eventually managed to take back control through a brutal campaign that killed thousands of Iraqis in the south. In the North, however, the international community imposed a no-fly zone that provided the Kurds with an autonomous region (Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett 2001). During the years of harsh economic sanctions, the infrastructure of the country was severely damaged. The provision of education as well as healthcare deteriorated markedly. Malnutrition, particularly among children, was widely reported. The Iraqi regime lost its main source of revenue (oil) and was not able to satisfy its population by providing them with economic prosperity. As a result, the regime resorted to traditional sectors of society, particularly tribal and religious leaders. A resurgence in tribal and religious values was reported during this period (Ismael and Ismael 2007)-a development that greatly influenced gender culture in the country, as will be shown in Chapter Four. In 2003, the US-led coalition toppled the Ba'ath regime to start a new era in the history of Iraq.

## **2.4 Post-Saddam: Traditional or Modern?**

After being part of an Islamic caliphate for centuries, Iraq struggled to create an identity for its new status as a nation-state. Since the days of its establishment in 1921 Iraq has experienced many modernising attempts and has been exposed to a myriad of modern ideologies. Yet, by the time the US and its allies occupied Iraq in 2003, almost one hundred years after the occupation of Iraq by the British Empire, it seems that Iraq had retained its traditional qualities to a great extent. Tribe, as an institution, still play a significant role in contemporary Iraq. Tribal customary law, which is widely used to settle conflicts and feuds,

is a manifestation of this influence. On the other hand, religious institutions are respected widely amongst Iraqi people. Religious leaders represent legitimate moral, and even political authority and are followed by millions of people.

Although Iraq has moved a long way from the era of British occupation, there is a mixed picture in Iraq when it comes to the tendencies towards tradition and modernity. Instead of 5%, around 78.5% of the population is now literate, for example, and the country is much more urbanised. In 2011, 66.5 % of the population lived in urban environments and the urbanisation rate for the period 2010-2015 is estimated to be 3.05 (CIA, The World Factbook). Iraq's economy is no longer agrarian, but a rentier one, hugely dependent on crude oil exports, and it is greatly linked to the global market. Iraq's national income is more dependent on a single natural resource than the population of any other country in the world. In 2010, natural resources (mainly crude oil) accounted for around 70% of Iraq's GDP (Gunter, 2013)<sup>8</sup>. Although Iraq's economy is integrated into the global market, it is considered to be an underdeveloped one, as Iraq has not been able to modernise its industry, services and finance sectors, and as a result the division of labour and the level of specialisation in Iraq is much more limited than in industrialised countries. Sexual division of labour is not modern either, as women mainly assume the traditional roles of child bearing and rearing, as well as other domestic responsibilities. Only 14% of Iraqi women are either working or actively seeking employment (United Nations Joint Analysis Unit Iraq 2012).

Nowadays, two very influential traditional institutions in Iraq work alongside the modern bureaucracy of the state: religious institutions in their Sunni and Shia forms, and tribal institutions in their Arabic and Kurdish<sup>9</sup> types. Each of these of institutions work according to their own laws; religious institutions draw on Sharia, which shapes social life

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<sup>8</sup> This figure fluctuates largely depending on the price of oil, which is very unstable, but it is considered to be very high for Iraq even when the prices of oil drop dramatically.

<sup>9</sup> It can be argued that tribe is weaker now in Kurdish regions than in Arabic ones, but still is an important institution, especially in rural areas.

in Iraq, whereas tribal institutions rely on tribal customary law to resolve its people's daily life issues as well as macro matters, especially in the political sphere. These two traditional laws, which have been influenced by each other for centuries, work side by side in the modern legal system of the Iraqi state; in some cases, they even influence state law, exerting their authority over the state. The influence of the institution of the tribe is so strong that Saleem al-Jubouri, the Iraqi Parliament Speaker, announced on November the 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014 that the Iraqi parliament is trying to sanction a law to incorporate tribal institutions into state law (H.H, Almada Press 2014). It is hard to tell whether this is an effort to satisfy the tribal leaders by sanctioning their authority through state law, or to bring them under the surveillance of state bureaucracy; however, it shows the amount of authority that the tribe bears in today's Iraqi society. Additionally, the Iraqi constitution gives special status to the institution of the tribe. Article 45(2) of the Iraqi constitution stipulates, "The State shall seek the advancement of the Iraqi clans and tribes...". The constitution also states that Islam is a major source of legislation and that no law that opposes Islam will be sanctioned in the country: "Islam is the official religion of the State and is a foundation source of legislation... No law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam" (Article 2(1)). The constitution even gives the authority to create laws to religious figures, and as a consequence, to religious institutions. Article 92(2) stipulates: "The Federal Supreme Court shall be made up of a number of judges, experts in Islamic jurisprudence, and legal scholars...". The federal Supreme Court is an influential body that "Oversee[s] the constitutionality of laws and regulations in effect" and "Interpret[s] the provisions of the Constitution" (Iraqi constitution, Article 93(1 and 2)).

The Iraqi state institutions, on the other hand, exert their authority over millions of people in Iraq through extended bureaucracy, despite the fact that it has to acknowledge the authority of traditional institutions that function outside its jurisdiction. Iraq is considered a

nation-state, with a seat in the United Nations. It has clear jurisdiction and recognised borders, although these are currently being seriously challenged by the Islamic State (IS), which has carved out a Caliphate through erasing the borders between Iraq and Syria since 2014. A parliamentary democracy is working in Iraq with a written constitution that was voted on by the majority of Iraqi people in 2005. Article One of this constitution describes the Republic of Iraq as being ‘fully sovereign’. Sovereignty is one of the most important characteristics of a modern state. It essentially indicates that within the limits of its jurisdiction no other actor may refute the authority of the state (Pierson 2004). Authority has always been a critical feature in any polity, however, there is a fundamental difference between the authority of pre-modern states with that of modern states. That is, sovereignty which is “the idea that there is a final and absolute authority in the political community” provided that “no final and absolute authority exists elsewhere” (Hinsley 198: 26). Despite the fact that there are questions around the nature and the extent of this authority, especially as a result of the intensification of globalised processes in recent decades (an issue that will be returned to in Chapter Three), the concept of the monopolistic authority of the modern state is widely acknowledged.

One of the main roles of the modern state, like any other political system, is to maintain social order within its jurisdiction. This is done through the exercise of the ultimate authority that the state possesses (Hinsley 1986). In a sovereign state the means of violence is the monopoly of the state; even when the state gives away part of its control over the means of violence, for example in the United States where people are allowed to possess guns, it does so on its own terms (Green 1988). Although coercion and violence have always been effective tools in the hands of the state to enforce social order, this objective is best achieved through legitimate authority where people obey the authorities on a voluntary basis. According to Weber, authority is the “empirical probability that a definable group of

individuals (as a result of various motives) will orient their social action to giving directives or commands, that another definable group (as a result of various motives) will orient their social action to obedience” (Weber in Kalberg 2005: 174). Authority, according to Weber, is different from power; he defines power as “the likelihood that one person in a social relationship will be able, even despite resistance, to carry out his own will” (ibid.), while people voluntarily submit to authority. People follow orders because they believe in the legitimacy of the authorities to issue orders; “[i]n general, it should be kept clearly in mind that the basis of every authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a belief, a belief by virtue of which persons exercising authority are lent prestige” (Weber 1978: 263). In other words, the authority needs to have a degree of legitimacy to evoke the minimum necessary compliance from the subordinates’ side.

Weber argues that all ruling powers can be understood as appealing to three types of principles of legitimation: rational-legal or bureaucratic, traditional, or charismatic. Charismatic leaders derive a ‘right to rule’ from their extraordinary personal traits and the belief that they enjoy superhuman capabilities. These charismatic characters defy the past and claim to bring about a new set of values, traditions and laws. On the other hand, traditional authority (patriarchal, religious, feudal, and patrimonial/monarchical, etc.) stems from a founded notion that believes in the sanctity of long-established traditions. This type of authority is dominant in traditional societies. The third source of legitimacy for rulers, rational-legal, is concerned with how it is considered legal in the eyes of people. In other words, this type of authority derives its legitimacy from a belief that rules, regulations, statuses, and laws have been, through objective procedure, appropriately enacted. According to this viewpoint, those who have been elevated to the position of authority under these rules are considered legitimate. While in any given society all models of authority might be present in some form of mixture, in modern societies, legal-rational authority has become

the preponderant authority and it challenges the other forms of authority. “Bureaucratic authority becomes all-pervasive in modern societies and stands in radical opposition to both charismatic and traditional rulership” (Weber in Kalsbergm 2005: 175).

The question here is whether Iraq is a sovereign modern state with a strong bureaucratic authority, or whether there are other types of authority that challenge the state’s authority. Iraq is a war-torn country that faces real challenges in upholding its sovereignty. The state has been unable to maintain its borders, and this makes the claim of full sovereignty in its constitution a myth. However, the authority of the Iraqi state is not just challenged by the militant groups which are attempting to disintegrate the country. It is also challenged by traditional institutions, which unlike groups such as IS, do not necessarily intend to destroy Iraq. The traditional institutions of religion and tribe exercise a huge amount of authority outside the jurisdiction of the state. This status is in contrast with the modern notion of sovereignty where a state exerts its ultimate authority through modern bureaucracy.

In the next section the two influential authorities of tribe and religion in Iraq will be examined in more detail.

## **2.5 Religious Authority**

Due to the lack of reliable updated data<sup>10</sup> to produce a demographic map of Iraq, we can only make an estimate of the population of Iraq, as well as the religion of its people. It is estimated that around 99% of the Iraqi population is Muslim. Shia Muslims make up around 60%-65% of the population, and around 32%-37% of people in Iraq are Sunni Muslims<sup>11</sup> (CIA, The World Factbook). There are differences in the way Sunni religious institutions organise and function when compared to Shia religious institutions; mainly due to different

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<sup>10</sup> The last nationwide census was in 1987.

<sup>11</sup> These figures are highly contested, but it is widely accepted that Shia Muslims constitute the majority of the population in Iraq.

historical trajectories, and as each of these religions has been affected by the different power balance in the Muslim world that was usually in favour of Sunni Muslims. Additionally, in Iraq after 2003, Arab Sunni clerics have been placed in a different position in comparison to their Kurdish Sunni counterparts, due to political differences in the regions that Arab and Kurd Sunnis occupy. However, there is a common trend in all Iraq, and that is the importance of the religious institutions' authority throughout the whole country. The influence of this authority clearly varies from community to community, and even from person to person, depending on many factors such as how religious that community or person is, the influence of modern state institutions on a particular community, or even other traditional institutions such as tribe. Though it varies from region to region, but the importance of the dominance of religious institutions in Iraqi society is undeniable. In this section, the focus will be on the Shia religious institutions, not least because it is believed that Shia Muslims comprise the majority of the population in Iraq.

In modern Shia Islam, religious authority is concentrated in the hands of a few highly respected *marjas*<sup>12</sup> who are mainly based in Najaf Seminary in Iraq, or the Qum Seminary of Iran<sup>13</sup>. For the last two centuries, religious authority in Shia Islam has been known as *marjaiya*. *Marjaiya* “describes “the position of a living Shiite [Shia] supreme legal authority” who supposedly possesses the exclusive authority to interpret sharia” (Khalaji 2006: 1). *Marja* is also the main authority who takes the responsibility for collecting and managing religious taxations, and he is the main administrator of religious foundations. Additionally, *Marja* has the authority to direct rituals, rites, and religious ceremonies. In fact, *Marjaiya* is the upper stratum of a hierarchical system within the *mujtahids*, who are

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<sup>12</sup> *Marja' at-taqlid* (The Source of Imitation), in short known as *marja*.

<sup>13</sup> There are a considerable number of *mujtahids* around the world who have the authority to interpret sharia and can be followed by non-*mujtahid* people. But in practice, only a handful of high-ranking *marjas*, most of them based in the seminaries of Najaf and Qum, can exert significant authority and have thousands and in some cases millions of followers.



Shia Islamic jurists that possess the authority to interpret sharia and give directives to the rest of the Shias who are non-*mujtahids* on how to lead their lives.

In the Shia branch of Islam, every sane adult has to follow a *mujtahid*, and they must submit to his directives in their daily activities. This is known as *taqlid* (literally means imitation). Anyone who is financially able is obliged to pay an Islamic taxation to the *mujtahid*. Four major *marjas* in Najaf<sup>14</sup> have the most *muqalids* (followers) in Iraq, and amongst them Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani has the biggest proportion (Khalaji 2006). Sistani is currently the most revered *marja* in Iraq, so much so that sometimes in Iraq the word *marjaya* is used synonymously with Sistani.

*Marjaya* in Najaf claims a traditional authority based on the Shia version of Islam. It “possesses the authority to seize control of the sanctity in society by directing rituals, rites, and religious ceremonies” (Khalaji 2006: 1). In fact, any traditional authority is “resting on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under rule” (Weber 1978: 215). Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Said Al-Hakim, one of the major *marjas* in Najaf, believes that “his responsibility is to be sure that he doing what he can to save his people. Those who follow him depend on his scholarship to direct them to the right path”, he states “I preserve the law” (Norton 2011: 141).

It is important to bear in mind that it is not always easy to determine which value, norm or custom is really ‘immemorial’, that is, has been passed to current generations from a far past. In any culture, certain values, norms or customs are branded as ‘traditional’ but when their roots are explored it becomes clear that they were ‘invented’ during a much more recent period than many would have expected. Their ‘invention’ and dissemination takes place for a variety for reasons, including political agendas (see Hobsbawm and Ranger

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<sup>14</sup> Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Said al-Hakim; Grand Ayatollah Bashir Hussein al-Najafi; and Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Ishaq al-Fayyad

2000). The fact that it is sometimes really hard to tell between traditions that are rooted in ancient times and those ‘invented’ in recent periods, is one of the problems of the modern-traditional dichotomy. Another problem is that the current traditional authorities live in a modern globalised era in which it is not conceivable to think that they have not been influenced by modern ideologies and developments. As will be shown in the next chapter, Iraqi religious authorities, who claim to preserve the traditions of the nation, actively use the most modern media technologies to reach out to their followers. As a result, in this thesis, by traditional authorities I mean people who are in positions that claim they preserve traditions, as in the case of Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Said Al-Hakim, mentioned above. Also, those people who are followed by other people for the assumption that they preserve traditions. It will be explained in detail how Iraqi religious leaders are followed by millions of people on a voluntary basis- not because they are in power or distribute funds to their followers. The same can be said of tribal leaders. They run customary courts and their rulings are respected by millions of Iraqis, due to the fact that they are viewed as people who are acting according to the traditions of the nation.

Sistani’s authority, and indeed all Shia *marjas* and *mujtahids*, is based “upon alleged absolute duty to obey” (Weber 1978: 934). According to Shia Islam, it is the duty of people to obey the Prophet Muhammad, and after the prophet, they are obliged to obey the 12 imams who are the descendants of Prophet Muhammad. It is believed that the last Imam has gone into hidden existence and will come back again to bring justice to earth. Until that time the *ulama* (Islamic scholars) are the representatives of the hidden Imam and are the legitimate authority that all Muslims must obey (Rahimi 2007). According to this ideology, the *ulama* possess the legitimate authority to lead people by interpreting God’s law (sharia). Shias are supposed to direct all their acts according to sharia presented by religious scholars, if they want to achieve happiness in this world and salvation in the after world.

In order for an authority to be sustained, it needs to be legitimised so that people obey it on a voluntary basis (Weber 1978). In persuading people to follow him, a *mujtahid* relies on compliance from the people's side, rather than coercive power. In fact, "since authority entails voluntary compliance with the superior's directive, it obviates the need for coercive force or sanctions" (Balu 1963: 307). This is a system of legitimisation through which *mujtahids* give themselves exclusive authority to interpret sharia, and they then use that same authority to interpret Islamic sources and come to the conclusion that everyone who is not a *mujtahid* has to follow one, or else s/he is not a proper Shia Muslim. In essence, Shia *mujtahids* like any other "authorities seek to convince themselves of the right to exert authority and attempt to implant the view, in demarcated groups of people, that this right is deserved" (Weber in Kalberg 2005: 174).

Najaf Seminary's, and especially Sistani's influence, is growing in the Shia world and specifically in Iraq. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, Sistani has been able to expand his network of followers, and consequently his financial power, leading to an increase in his prestige as a major Shia religious leader. Sistani is the top man in his network of organisations, and he:

oversees a loyal body of activists, students, ministers, representatives, and wakils (agents) who operate and administer his vast, multimillion-dollar transnational network of seminaries, mosques, and welfare-based organizations from India to Nigeria, from London to New York, and from Qom to Najaf, arguably representing the most organised religious association in post-Ba'athist Iraq (Rahimi 2007: 3-4).

This vast organisation is an 'administration by notables' which work through trusted *wakils*, ministers and representatives around the world who collect religious taxations and supervise

spending on helping the needy, establishing and running religious centres such as libraries and publication centres, establishing and running welfare institutions such as hospitals, as well as funding the seminaries and paying the religious students (*talaba*), among other activities. There are hundreds of Shia clerics associated with these organisations who are disseminating Islamic thoughts through local mosques around the world, including Iraq. These clerics are not necessarily *mujtahids* and, therefore, they have to rely on *mujtahids*' and especially big *marjas*' publications in their sermons. Furthermore, organisations under Sistani and other big *marjas* run tens of TV channels and websites (apart from the *marjas*' main websites) in which Shia clerics of various rank give religious sermons and discuss Islamic matters. Therefore "it is no exaggeration to say that for many Shia Muslims their understanding of piety and practice derives from ... Najaf" (Norton 2011: 134).

These organisations function through the division of labour in a bureaucratic and hierarchical manner; however, it is not a modern bureaucracy- it is a traditional institution. Unlike modern institutions, Shia seminaries, including Najaf, have not been able to "orient action toward general rules and regulation" in an environment where "procedures maximize calculation" (Weber in Kalberg 2005: 175). *Wakils*' viewpoints on how to administer religious tax revenue varies, and they often have competing and conflicting methods concerning how the money should be spent and who should spend it. This has led to a decentralised and self-governing network of organisations working under one big *marja*. Unlike modern bureaucracies, these networks, including networks that are managed by Ayatollah Sistani, function in an ambiguous manner where there exists no system of abstract rules for determining the regulations of the organisations; hence they lack a clear list of duties for different positions within these organisations. Furthermore, the employees, especially the trusted *wakils*, are not employed through clear procedures based on speciality, qualifications and merit, but rather through traditional contacts amongst influential people

inside seminaries that are far from impersonal. For example, three of the most important *wakils* of Sistani are his family members and relatives. Muhammad Reda Sistani, Sistani's son, and Sistani's two sons-in-law, Shahrestani, and Murtada Kashmiri, are the most senior of his *wakils* (Rahimi 2007). Additionally, contrary to modern bureaucracies, which are "endowed with legitimacy by a belief that rules, regulations, statutes, and laws have been properly enacted; that is through "objective" modes of procedure" (Weber in Kalberg 2005: 175), Najaf Seminary derives its legitimacy from its traditional values.

Through these networks, which incorporate a mixture of religious, social, political as well as economic activities, Najaf Seminary exerts a great amount of authority and domination over millions of Iraqis by way of consent and compliance. In order to wield influence over such a considerable number of people, a considerable number of staff is required. Various types of staff work for Najaf *marjas*, but in particular, *wakils* are "trusted to execute the general policy as well as the specific commands". *Wakils* are "bound to obedience to their superior (or superiors) by custom, by affectual ties, by... material complex of interests, or by value-based motives" (Weber in Kalberg 2005: 191-2) or a combination of these factors. By obeying the *marja*, *wakils* are submitting to tradition. At the same time, other factors such as family ties, for example as in the case of the senior *wakils* of Sistani mentioned previously, as well as materialistic interests such as a good salary and also social prestige and status, play a role in sustaining the seminary system. However, what makes this system so powerful is its legitimacy. *Marjaiya* is a legitimate authority in the eyes of millions of Shias and this makes them, at least to a certain degree, voluntarily submit to this authority.

Najaf's main *marjas*, and especially Ayatollah Sistani's power, is by no means limited to the seemingly trivial affairs of everyday life. They are also able to exert great power in the political domain. For example, Sistani issued a fatwa to take up arms against the IS, effectively forming an army. There is no state law that gives him this power, and he does

not occupy any bureaucratic position that allows him or his institutions to manage this. Despite all that, after the surge of the IS in June 2014 which led to the fall of several cities and towns into the hands of the militants, Ayatollah Sistani issued a fatwa ordering all able-bodied men to take up arms against IS. Tens of thousands of men answered Sistani's call (BBC News 2014; Chivers 2014). This move was supported by many politicians in Iraq, and was widely seen by the Shia population as a wise act that halted IS's advance, a threat that at the time was directly affecting Baghdad.

The traditional authority of the Najaf Seminary, and especially its main figure, Ayatollah Sistani, is on par with the authority of the Iraqi state. Sistani is able to influence people's behaviour and moralities; he was also able to influence American policy in Iraq. He can recruit soldiers; he collects tax, and is even capable of changing the candidate for premiership. Ali al-Allagh, one of the 11 main leaders of the Islamic Dawa Party, in an interview with Iraqi Alsumaria TV published on YouTube, explains how when the internal and external pressures mounted on the party to change their candidate for premiership, they decided to consult Sistani. He explained how when Sistani made it clear in a written letter that he takes the idea that the candidate, which at the time was the then Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, needs to be replaced, nine members of the board voted for a change, and Haidar al-Ebadi the current Prime Minister of Iraq was nominated (Alsumaria 2014).

This is a testament to the fact that the Iraqi state does not possess a monopoly of authority as a sovereign state; it has to share its authority with the traditional authority of religion and tribe, as will be explained in the next section.

## **2.6 Tribal Authority**

Religious institutions are not the only bearers of traditional authority in Iraq. Tribe as a pre-modern institution also has a strong presence as a traditional authority in this country. Tribal

identity is a prominent element in Iraqi society. It is estimated that around 80% of Iraqis retain some kind of tribal ties. Tribes in Iraq are comprised of segmentary lineage groups, with *beit* as the smallest segment and *qabilha* the largest one. These segmentary groups are organised on the basis of kinship. *Beit*, in essence, is an extended family composed of hundreds of members. On a higher level, *fakhdh* (clan) includes several *beits*. A number of *fakhdhs* make up an *ashira* (tribe); these two segments have political and military roles. An *ashira* might have from few thousand to more than one hundred thousand members. The largest segment is a *qabilah*, which is a confederation of tribes (Asfura-Heim 2014).

This type of social organisation is characteristic of pre-modern tribal societies. In these clan-based societies of homogenous masses, solidarity is based on resemblance. These are segmental societies, which are “characterised by the repetition of similar groupings, rather like the rings of an earthworm” (Durkheim in Giddens 1998: 142). These groupings (the clans) are structured around blood bonds. In other words, familial ties relate members of the clans to each other. Social activities within these clans are similar to one another, which points to the division of labour in these societies being very limited. Hence, each of these clans functions in nearly the same manner and is self-sufficient (Durkheim 1984). One of the products of a simple division of labour is a strong collective conscience. In pre-modern societies with little occupational differentiation, a deep-rooted and repressive collective conscience dominates each society member’s mind over the individual’s constituent consciousness (Wallwork 1972). However, this does not mean that in these societies the only conscience is common conscience; individual conscience exists too, although in a weak and vague state compared to the strong collective conscience (Pope and Johnson 1983). Homogeneity in occupations results in similarity in people’s interests and goals; this in turn brings about the development of a similar set of norms and values that is shared by almost every member of that society (Durkheim 1984). Individuals in such societies have to abide

by collectively enforced social laws and must attach themselves to other members of that society through these rules of conduct; this is the manifestation of a strong conscience collective (Wallwork 1972). This dominant collective conscience connects each member of society together and helps the individual to integrate within that society; indeed, in pre-modern societies collective conscience was the source of social solidarity that “creates solidarity out of similarities between members” (Muller 1994: 79).

Iraqi society contains strong elements of a pre-modern tribal society. The segmentary structure of the Iraqi tribes, which is organised around lineage bonds, is a characteristic of Iraqi society. In addition, a strong collective conscious exists in the form of “the high premium put on in group solidarity (‘asabiyya), which finds expression in loyalty to the family, clan...and pride in ancestry (nasb)” (Eisenstadt 2007: 17). Kinship, real or fictive, is the basis of the Iraqi tribes; as a result, the notion of clan and family is central to Iraqi society.

It should be noted, however, that Iraqi society is not a nomadic tribal society that functions only along tribal ties. People in Iraq live a hybrid life; a civil life with all its imperatives and a tribal life with its consequences. People are greatly influenced by the state, especially when it comes to the economy. In a rentier economy such as that of Iraq, the state is the main patron. The Iraqi government, as the biggest employer in the country, employs millions of people. “Almost 50 percent of Iraq’s labor force is currently directly or indirectly on the public payroll” (Gunter 2013: 183). Even private businesses are mainly dependent on the government, whether directly through government tenders, or indirectly by increasing the purchasing power of people through salaries, as public-sector payments form the main source of income for millions of people in Iraq. Additionally, food rations, which is a basket of several food items distributed monthly amongst the population, is a major source of food security for millions of Iraqis, since coverage of this system is almost universal (Gunter 2013). The education system is another sector that shows the presence of the state as millions



of Iraqi children go to school. People have to deal with the state on a daily basis; from schools and universities to police and security forces, the Iraqi state is present in Iraqi people's everyday lives. However, all the above-mentioned functions of the state are influenced by the traditional authority of the tribe. From the top level, such as when a politician wants to run for election and tribal ties come in play, to smaller matters such as employment in the public sector where tribal ties show themselves in the form of nepotism. It is fair then to say that "[t]ribal values remain deeply ingrained in Iraqi society and have had a profound influence on Iraqi social mores and political culture" (Eisenstadt 2007: 17).

The influence of the tribe over people also depends on where they are located. In rural areas, a more tribal lifestyle is adopted by people; whereas in bigger cities the presence of the tribe is weaker. However, even in the most urban parts of Iraq, tribal presence and influence is still strong and visible. Modern Iraqi tribes are settled in villages and cities, therefore people maintain tribal ties and customs, thereby living according to both tribal customs and modern civil lifestyles.

Today's contemporary rural-urban hybrids are held together by the traditional tribal characteristics of solidarity (*asabiyya*), true (and more often fictitious) kinship ties, patron-client relationships, and tribal customs and laws. Although traditional tribal organisation is disappearing in the urban setting, modern tribes maintain elements of tribal culture and retain the ability to mobilise both politically and militarily. In modern Iraq, tribalism lives in symbiosis with contemporary ideologies and social and political movements (Asfura-Heim 2014: 3).

### **2.6.1 Tribe as a Legal Authority**

As a result of the strong notion of tribal bonds and collective consciousness, the traditional authority of the tribe is widely respected in Iraq, to the point that tribe is even given legal authority and challenging Iraqi modern institutions.

Arab states have had notorious difficulties in establishing regularized and legitimate legal processes and in imposing them throughout their territories. The result has often been a form of legal pluralism in which religious, tribal, or even rival political forces render decisions on matters that would be, in Western conceptions of the state, under its purview alone. In particular, well-developed systems of tribal law originating in the pre-Islamic era have continued to function in the modern Arab world. Sometimes a state's challenger and sometimes its crutch, the role of tribal law in the Arab world today is best understood as a fluid product of ongoing negotiation between state and tribal actors (Carrol 2011: 11).

Tribes in Iraq have their own customary law. Nowadays in Iraq, most of these laws are written in formal documents and can be voted on by tribal notables. These tribal customary laws are there to resolve conflicts between people from the same tribe. Similarity these laws has made it easy to arbitrate when a conflict occurs between members of two different tribes (Carroll 2011). Across Iraq people go to tribal courts that work according to tribal customary law to settle their problems. The judges in these courts are tribal Sheikhs.

People refer to these tribal courts for a variety of reasons. Iraq's justice system suffers from fundamental problems, which have undermined its trust and respect in the eyes of many Iraqis. Availability of the state court is another issue. The adverse security situation has caused the Iraqi state justice system to deteriorate even more. In some areas in Iraq, state

courts are not available at all. In the areas under IS, for example, militia courts are the only justice system available. Even in areas that are under the control of the Iraqi state, access to the courts is limited, at least for some groups of people. According to the Access to Justice Program administered by USAID-Iraq “[o]nly 12% of Iraq’s vulnerable people have access to the formal justice system” (USAID-Iraq). Many people, especially in more remote rural areas, are not even aware of their rights and do not know how to approach a state court. Tribal authorities are more relevant to their daily lives than the complicated bureaucracy of the modern state justice system. This becomes clearer when we consider the fact that an estimated 23% of Iraqi people were illiterate in 2011 (CIA, The World Factbook). Tribal courts are quicker and more practical for a large proportion of the population in Iraq. Sheikhs who take the responsibility of judges are familiar with the cultural nuances and the problems that might arise in this culture. These courts are cheaper, less complicated, and the language is easier to understand for many people, than the complicated language and concepts of state courts. More importantly, tribe and tribal Sheikhs represent a traditional authority for people in Iraq. They respect the sanctity of ancient tribal customs and values, and are happy to submit to the authority of the tribe and the Sheikhs who are responsible for preserving them. That is why despite the fact that during the 1970s and 1980s when the state was powerful and the state court system was operational throughout the country, although the operation of tribal customary law became limited, especially in urban areas, it never disappeared (Carroll 2011).

Different political systems in Iraq have appreciated the importance of tribal authorities. The British rulers of Iraq after the First World War realised that in order to rule Iraq they would have to buy tribes’ allegiance. This was achieved through the sanctioning of TCCDR, explained previously. By the same token, when the Americans faced a huge insurgency in Iraq, they had to approach tribal authorities to pursue their plans. The counterinsurgency

successes in 2006-2007 were achieved due to the participation of Sunni tribes in Iraq when tribal Sheikhs started the Anbar Awakening movement, which was a widespread rebellion against al-Qaeda's presence by tribal leaders of the Anbar province who took up arms against the Islamic militant group (Eisenstadt 2007).

Tribal influence is preponderant from any Iraqi social aspect, and although many people refer to tribal customary courts to resolve their conflicts according to tribal customary law, tribal ties do not just come in handy in times of conflicts and problems. Tribal ties are present everywhere, even in state institutions. Strong tribal ties can guarantee higher social status, better economic opportunities, and even the improved prospect of being elected in a local or national election.

Essentially, Iraqi people, especially in more tribal communities, "are more strongly bound by these tribal ties and a strict honor code than by ethnic background or religion" (Hassan 2007: 1).

## **2.7 Conclusion**

When the Iraqi state was established in 1921 at the hands of the British Empire, the country was largely isolated from modern developments. The British introduced many modern ideas, including a constitutional monarchy ruling a nation state. At the time, the country was deeply traditional with tribal and religious institutions able to exert tremendous influence in society. Almost a century later, these two institutions are still powerful. Successive regimes in Iraq have attempted to modernise the country by adopting modern ideologies such as Marxism, Socialism, Nationalism, etc., and also building modern institutions such as universal education and health systems. They also pursued this goal through bringing the traditional institutions under the control of the state. The autocratic regimes, especially during the last half of the century, marginalised the traditional institutions, rendering state institutions as

the major ones, but the 'democratic' process post-2003 and the weak state institutions of this era, brought the traditional institutions of tribe and religion to the fore once again. The religious institutions have great power as they are respected by millions of Iraqis. People are obliged by God to follow the traditional religious leaders as they are considered to be the protectors of ancient values. Leaders such as Ayatollah Sistani are so respected that people followed his fatwa to go to war. The tribal leaders, on the other hand, have judicial powers and are effectively considered to be legitimate judges who can decide on the most critical matters, even murder. However, Iraqi society is not a purely tribal society. Many modern institutions, state-related and not, have an important role to play. This has given Iraq a hybrid status in which modern institutions work alongside traditional institutions. The next chapter will show how Iraq became reconnected to the globalisation process in 2003, after years of isolation as a result of sanctions and how this raises concerns about the traditions of the country.

## **Chapter 3: Globalisation and the Media in Iraq**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The term globalisation is widely used nowadays in the media, and has even entered the daily conversations of people. The academic debates around this phenomenon are still ongoing, particularly among the proponents and sceptics of the concept. The question is whether this increasing global interconnectedness is bringing the world as we know it closer, or is it intrinsically transforming it? In this chapter I will argue that globalisation has ushered in a distinct modern era with structural transformations in the political, economic, and cultural realms. It will then be shown how Iraq became ‘reconnected’ to the global processes through the 2003 invasion. Iraq was largely isolated from global developments as a result of the nature of Saddam’s regime and, importantly, due to the harsh sanctions imposed on the country after 1990. This chapter is particularly interested in the globalisation of communications and the role this plays in Iraqi society. Technology, and particularly communication technology, has always been an integral part of the globalisation processes. Using electromagnetic waves in communication devices took the communications to the next level. The internet then connected the world like never before. These technologies bring with them different ideologies and images. They create spaces for people to exchange ideas. As will be shown in this chapter, this capability is viewed as being particularly dangerous by most MENA regimes. As the public sphere has traditionally been under the control of the regimes, they have been very sensitive to communication technologies’ ability to create virtual public spaces. Hence, through a variety of mechanisms, they have attempted to monitor and control TV and online spaces. However, state agencies in post-Saddam Iraq are not monitoring or controlling this system. This does not mean the political and social elites are not concerned about the ideas and images being transferred through globalised media.

The public has also shown concern, particularly over Western or Westernised media contents that are viewed as endangering their ‘original’ cultural values of the country.

### **3.2 Globalisation**

Although contested, many see globalisation as being a modern phenomenon. Terms such as ‘globalisation’, ‘globalise’ and ‘globalising’ were not commonly used amongst the public or even the media until about the 1960s. Webster was the first major dictionary to offer definitions of the words globalism and globalisation in 1961 (Waters 2001). It took the concept several more years to gain currency in academia; it was not until the 1980s that ‘globalisation studies’ started to grow (Robertson 1992). Since then, coming up with a definitive definition of globalisation has proven difficult for social scientists, as the “concept is too fuzzy” (Lechner and Boli 2015: 5). It can refer to a process or processes, or to ideas that justify and explain these processes, or a viewpoint that interprets them. Therefore, when it comes to understanding globalisation, “multiple conversations coexist (although few real dialogues), which do not readily afford a coherent or definitive characterization” (Held and McGrew 2005: 2).

Nonetheless, there is a concrete and tangible material aspect within the notion of globalisation that can help us explain the concept. For example, flows of people, capital and trade across the globe, which are facilitated by a variety of modern infrastructures and technologies. These infrastructures come in different forms. They can be physical such as the infrastructure in the transport sector or banking systems. They can be normative such as trade rules. They can also come in symbolic forms, such as English as a lingua franca. These infrastructures “establish the preconditions for regularized and relatively enduring forms of global interconnectedness” (Held and McGrew 2005: 3). This interconnectedness is not a random encounter; rather, it is deep-rooted, enduring, and worldwide. Thus, the concept

globalisation refers to much more than extending social relations and activities across different regions and countries. It denotes a growing magnitude or intensity of global flows in a way that states and societies find themselves increasingly enmeshed in global systems and networks of interaction. There are clear consequences for this increasing enmeshment of societies in worldwide networks. For example, an event that happens in a very distant place can easily have a great impact on the domestic environment of other countries and vice versa. The famous terrorist attacks of 9/11 are clear examples of a distant occurrence with great impact on local circumstances in Iraq, as will be explained later. This shows that “globalization represents a significant shift in the spatial reach of social relations and organization towards the interregional or intercontinental scale” (ibid). It should be emphasised that this does not mean that the local, national or regional order of social life will be displaced by the global; rather, that the local becomes embedded within growing interregional interconnectedness.

### **3.3 Iraq in a Globalising World**

Iraq has also been part of the globalising processes. In recent years Iraq’s fate has been greatly shaped by incidents that took place thousands of miles away. The 9/11 New York terrorist attacks in 2001 have had great consequences for Iraq, and have altered every single aspect of Iraq’s social, political, economic and cultural life. In 2002, the government of the United States of America announced that Iraq was one component of the ‘axis of evil’; this was part of ‘the global war on terrorism’ campaign that was triggered by the 9/11 attacks. Consequently, it was decided that its regime must change, resulting in the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq that toppled Saddam Hussein (Anghie 2005; Kellner 2003) and ushered in a new era for Iraqis- an era of huge chaos, but also increasing integration into the globalisation processes. As a major oil exporter, for decades, Iraq has been a part of global



markets. Iraq has failed to diversify its economy and as a result is hugely dependent on oil revenues. Oil prices are determined in international energy markets, which places the fate of Iraq dependent on many external factors, such as global economic growth and conflicts in other parts of the world. On the other hand, Iraq's ability (or inability) to supply oil is an important factor in global oil prices, affecting the livelihood of billions of people around the world. For 12 years after the invasion, and the occupation of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990 and the consequent war that expelled Iraqi forces from Kuwait, until the overthrowing of Saddam's regime in 2003, Iraq's integration into the global arena has been severely disrupted. During this period, Iraq was under crippling sanctions that greatly cut the country off from many global processes (Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett 2001). Although one can argue that the whole embargo enforced on Iraq was the result of a consensus achieved by the major global powers operating according to a modern global system represented by the UN Security Council, it is not possible to ignore the consequences of these sanctions in terms of isolating Iraq from the globalisation processes that were occurring at that time in other parts of the world.

As a result of Iraq's aggression towards Kuwait, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1990, the United Nations passed Resolution 661 and accordingly "froze Iraqi financial assets abroad and banned imports and exports, allowing only medical supplies to be imported without restrictions, and, "in humanitarian circumstances, foodstuffs" (Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett 2001: 290). As a result, Iraq was prevented from its major source of revenue, oil, and this had serious ramifications for the economy of the country as well as the well-being of its people (Arnove 2002). This meant that Iraq would be isolated from the global markets to a great extent, as its diminishing revenue and the embargo on exports to Iraq meant that this country, which was heavily dependent on foreign goods, would be isolated from global markets. The resolution made sure that Iraq could not benefit from any global economic systems and stipulated "...all States shall not make available to the Government of Iraq or

to any commercial, industrial or public utility undertaking in Iraq or Kuwait, any funds or any other financial or economic resources...”. To even further isolate Iraq, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 1990, the Security Council adopted resolution 670, which emphasised that all states:

shall deny permission to any aircraft to take off from their territory if the aircraft would carry any cargo to or from Iraq or Kuwait other than food in humanitarian circumstances, subject to authorization by the Council or the Committee established by resolution 661 (1990) and in accordance with resolution 666 (1990), or supplies intended strictly for medical purposes or solely for UNIIMOG...

There were also “Calls upon all States to detain any ships of Iraqi registry which enter their ports...”. (United Nations, 2016, for details of the sanctions regime see the United Nations Website, Security Council Resolutions). During the 12 years of sanctions, Iraqi people suffered severely as a result of the collapse of an economy that was disconnected from the outside world. The only link was through the Oil for Food programme. With growing concern over the humanitarian situation in the country, the United Nations came to an agreement with Iraq to implement measures to enable Iraq to sell limited quantities of oil to meet its humanitarian needs. The programme started to operate in late 1996 and ended in 2003. Under this programme, which was strictly controlled and administrated by the UN, Iraq was able to buy only humanitarian goods and to pay war compensation and expenses to some UN committees (For more details see Office of the Iraq Programme-Oil-for-Food).

Not only did these sanctions and embargoes restrict the movement of capital and goods, but also people. As an indirect consequence of these sanctions, the flow of knowledge was also severely disrupted, as Iraq’s knowledge centres and educational institutions were

isolated during this period, due to lack of funds, as well as due to lack of communication with the outside world. The flow of information facilitated by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) was very limited, mainly as a result of Iraq's policies on the flow of information, as will be explained later. The movement of Iraqi citizens was further restricted by the Iraqi regime's policies on travelling abroad. The regime required Iraqis to obtain expensive exit visas to be able to travel abroad. The fees were so high that the majority of people could not afford them, especially as most Iraqis had slipped into extreme poverty due to the damaged economy. People could not travel abroad more than twice a year, and some even were asked to post collateral to make sure they returned (Cordesman and Hashim 1997). So, all in all, people's movement from inside Iraq to outside was very restricted and limited, and also, due to the on-going hostilities between the Iraqi regime and most of its neighbouring countries and the international community, foreign nationals found it difficult to travel to Iraq too.

### **3.4 The 2003 Regime Change: Major Developments**

As mentioned previously, the main global event that changed the face of Iraq was the 9/11 attacks and the consequent 'war of terror', announced by the then president of the United States, George W Bush. After the terrorist attacks of 9/11, a sizable percentage of the American people believed that there was a connection between Saddam Hussein's regime and the attacks. This, in addition to an overwhelming majority of U.S Congress, who supported the military intervention in Iraq, helped the Bush administration to launch its plan of regime change in Iraq. On March the 18<sup>th</sup> 2003, an ultimatum was issued by Bush ordering Saddam and his two sons to leave Iraq within 48 hours. Saddam refused and Operation Iraqi Freedom began on March the 20<sup>th</sup> 2003. Saddam was toppled after 21 days (Fattah and Caso 2009). Since then the old political system that was in place for decades and revolved around

Saddam Hussein and his network of power has been replaced by an entirely unstable and chaotic new system, with various power centres that was meant, in theory, to be a representative democracy. For 35 years prior to 2003, the Ba'ath Party, and especially Saddam Hussein, ruled the country according to a closed system through a brutal and notorious secret police system. The regime was a brutal dictatorship with no free elections, no freedom of expression, no free press; as a result, the country witnessed rampant human rights abuses. During the reign of the Ba'ath Party, “[i]ntelligence services proliferated, the numbers of secret police and spies multiplied, and party militia roamed the streets” (Dawisha 2009: 215). Any opposition, even in the slightest form, was not tolerated and was treated with utmost brutality. During Saddam’s rule (1979-2003) he was the only leader of the country; every ideology or school of thought that was not in line with his, was utterly suppressed. The regime revolved around Saddam and his team, many of them his family or tribe members from his hometown (Marr 2012). The Revolutionary Command Council headed by Saddam was the ultimate decision making institution in Iraq, taking the responsibility for both legislative and executive decision making, ensuring that Saddam was the ultimate unquestionable authority in the country. The country was ruled with an iron fist (Makiya and Samir 1989). Thousands of political dissidents were imprisoned, exiled or executed. The rest fled the country. Any uprising was also brutally crushed. For example, in the intifada uprising of 1991 “[t]housands were killed or executed, with bodies left in the street” (Marr 2012: 228).

The picture has now changed dramatically. Since 2005 three general elections have taken place, and although they have been described as rigged by some Iraqi political groups, they are considered amongst the freest in the region. International agencies consider many aspects of the elections as “consistent with international standards (International Mission for Iraqi Elections (IMIE) 2006: 28) and that “national parliamentary elections generally met

international standards of free and fair elections and saw the peaceful transition of power from former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki to Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi” (U.S. Department of State 2014: 1). Unlike most neighbouring countries, a range of ethno-religious and political groups are represented in the parliament. Women enjoy a 25 percent quota, which is 30 percent for the Kurdistan region’s local parliament.

After years of largely secular parties’ rule in Iraq, this chaotic democracy brought mainly religious parties to power. This is particularly true about the central government, as well as the national parliament in Baghdad. Since the invasion, the Islamic sentiment has been the preponderant one in Iraq, and this has had many consequences for the country. The rise of Islamic parties and groups have been particularly consequential for women’s status in Iraq, as these groups have tried to consolidate a more traditional patriarchal system.

After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the sanctions and embargoes were removed (see the United Nations website, Security Council Resolutions for details of the resolutions regarding the removal of sanctions after 2003), resulting in the increasing integration of Iraq into globalisation processes. Iraq was once again able to sell its oil freely on the global market, and the Iraqi Central Bank was linked to the global banking system to be able to transfer hundreds of billions of dollars during the past 13 years. Iraq is now the second biggest crude oil producer in OPEC, with production at over four million barrels a day (Razzouk 2015), and it is an important player in the global energy market. Furthermore, after 2003, international markets opened their doors to Iraq, and it is estimated that Iraq imported \$42.94 billion worth of commodities from markets around the world (CIA 2016). Hundreds of international companies and corporations entered Iraq mainly to work on the ambitious plans for development of the oil and gas sector in the country. Giant energy companies from around the globe, such as British Petroleum (BP), Shell, Total, Lukoil, Eni, ExxonMobil, Petronas, and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), are currently working on

multi-billion dollar projects in Iraq to develop the oil sector (Donovan *et al.* 2010). This is a clear sign of the free flow of capital, people, expertise, knowledge, goods, and so on, and how integrated into the global processes Iraq became after the fall of Saddam Hussein. On the other hand, Iraq has established extensive relationships with global financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. An indicator of this relationship is the loans Iraq has received and is projected to receive, provided that it follows liberal financial and economic policies (see, the World Bank 2015; Torchia 2015; International Monetary Fund 2016).

This means that Saddam's socialist system, which was centrally planned and controlled, gave way to a new system that, although still largely run by the state and dominated by the oil sector, which provides a very large proportion of the country's revenue and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), has opened its doors to domestic and foreign private investments. In effect, Iraq's economy has "partially evolved from central planning to state-guided capitalism" (Gunter 2013: 5). This partial and half-done transformation has contributed towards the rampant corruption and incompetence that exists in the economy. Although Iraq's revenue has jumped dramatically, especially during the high oil-price period of 2013 and 2014, the services provided to people and the infrastructure, are in a miserable condition, especially outside Kurdistan. The 2003 war and the consequent looting, as well as the continuous conflicts and war, terrorist attacks, and military operations, have added to the destruction and left Iraqis in a disastrous situation. Like the political transition, the economic transition has also been chaotic for a variety of reasons, including politicians' inability to update the legal framework, which is desperately needed to modernise the economy. This has been mainly due to their deep disagreements, but also because many political parties benefit financially from this non-transparent environment. However, the regime change has allowed Iraq to produce four million barrels of oil a day, as explained

earlier, and that has meant that Iraq's GDP jumped to \$223.5 billion in 2014 (the World Bank 2016) from \$29 billion in 2001 (CIA 2007). Although poverty is widespread throughout Iraq, mainly due to rampant corruption and malfunction of the state institutions (Gunter, 2013), this rapid growth in wealth has meant that millions of Iraqis are now part of the consumer culture in a way never before seen in Iraq, as the centrally controlled socialist system restricted the growth of a capitalist free market. Moreover, the years of sanctions made it impossible for Iraq to be part of the free market in any way. But now people are exposed to a variety of products and services that they never had before, and they are bombarded with advertisements from the media, helping create a new lifestyle for many Iraqis.

In terms of the movement of people, the picture is currently completely different from Iraq under sanctions. It is estimated that 2.5 million tourists (mainly religious tourists) visit Iraq every year (Gunter 2013), a far cry from the days of sanctions. In addition, hundreds of thousands of Iraqi people travel abroad for work, education and tourism<sup>15</sup>. In an interview with the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), the Iranian Vice President and Head of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization, Masoud Soltani-Far said that two million Iraqi tourists visit Iran annually (IRNA 2014). Iraq has clearly become connected to the world after years of strict isolation, as Iraqis are not only travelling to Iran in their millions, but to other destinations; this is clear from the Baghdad International Airport arrivals and departures board (Baghdad International Airport 2016). Furthermore, in an attempt to connect Iraq to the global flow of ideas and knowledge, the Iraqi central government, as well the Kurdistan Region Government (KRG), has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on sending thousands of students to study abroad (ICEF Monitor 2013).

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<sup>15</sup> These people mainly reside in areas that are either under the central government or the Kurdistan regional government's control and are considered to be more stable and secure. Millions of Iraqis who live in areas occupied by IS, have left their homes as displaced people.

Iraq's intensified integration into the globalisation processes has meant that socio-political, economic and cultural spheres have been shaped, at least partially, by these processes. Equally, Iraq's internal conditions are also shaping global processes, as is clear from the energy market; the rise of jihadi terrorism in Iraq, and the flow of migration towards Europe.

On the other hand, the toppling of Saddam ignited an on-going war that has resulted in tens of thousands of casualties. Since 2003, 242,000 people have been killed in Iraq, as a direct result of successive wars and military operations; the vast majority of them are civilians, including 16000 civilians since March 2015 (Hamourtziadou 2016). In addition to that, these on-going conflicts have forced millions of Iraqis to flee their homes. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) there are around four million internally displaced people in Iraq (UNHCR-Iraq 2016). These dramatic changes have disturbed the fabric of Iraqi society. In areas that have been under the rule of the IS since 2014, massacres and atrocities have taken place. These regions are ruled according to strict Islamic sharia<sup>16</sup> that extremely restricts individual choices, especially for women. It is important to note that the wars and military operations did not affect all regions of Iraq equally. The majority of the Shia south and the majority of the Kurdish north are less damaged. While areas with a majority Sunni population in the middle of the country, or mixed Sunni-Shia areas such as Baghdad, have suffered a lot from the conflicts. Therefore, it is fair to say that Iraq as a country has suffered a lot from the ongoing war. Hundreds of Kurdish fighters from Kurdistan were killed during the war against IS (Rudaw 2015). The number of Shia fighters from the southern Shia majority provinces is reported to be in the thousands (Aljazeera net). Additionally, non-terrorist crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping and murder have been on the rise in many Iraqi cities (al-Jaffal 2015).

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<sup>16</sup> Many Muslim scholars as well as ordinary Muslims don't consider these rules to be Islamic.



As a result of the above, stability on many different levels, has been very shaky and poor. As Table 1 (Cordesman 2011: 21) clearly shows, by 2011, eight years after the regime change, basic services are in a very poor condition. Even in the Kurdistan region, which has the best status in terms of basic services, the services have been described as unstable. Other indicators such as government effectiveness, political effectiveness, economic development and rule of law, are mainly unstable. There is not a single indicator in a single province or region that is considered to be stable. All of this was before the IS swept through one third of the country in 2014, and before Iraq was hit by a severe economic downturn due to the dramatic fall in oil prices. There has also been a stalemate in the political process in Kurdistan as a result of an internal political crisis that led to the dissolving of the local parliament unilaterally by the will of one of the major political parties in Kurdistan (Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)) in 2015 (Salih 2015). No wonder Iraq is the least happy nation amongst the 65 countries included in a Gallup poll (WIN/Gallup 2014).

## Stability by Province: 4/21/2011

### STABILITY DEVELOPMENT ROADMAP, 1/2011–3/2011

PROVINCE	BASIC SERVICES	GOVERNMENT EFFECTIVENESS	POLITICAL EFFECTIVENESS	ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	RULE OF LAW
Anbar	Very Unstable	Unstable	Unstable	Unstable	Moderately Stable
Babylon	Very Unstable	Unstable	Moderately Stable	Unstable	Unstable
Baghdad	Very Unstable	Unstable	Unstable	Unstable	Unstable
Basrah	Very Unstable	Unstable	Moderately Stable	Unstable	Unstable
Diyala	Very Unstable	Unstable	Moderately Stable	Moderately Stable	Moderately Stable
Kerbala	Very Unstable	Unstable	Moderately Stable	Moderately Stable	Unstable
Kurdistan Region	Unstable	Unstable	Unstable	Moderately Stable	Moderately Stable
Missan	Very Unstable	Unstable	Moderately Stable	Very Unstable	Unstable
Muthanna	Unstable	Unstable	Unstable	Unstable	Unstable
Najaf	Very Unstable	Unstable	Moderately Stable	Unstable	Moderately Stable
Ninewa	Very Unstable	Unstable	Unstable	Unstable	Very Unstable
Qadisiya	Very Unstable	Moderately Stable	Unstable	Very Unstable	Moderately Stable
Salah Al-Din	Very Unstable	Unstable	Unstable	Unstable	Unstable
Tameem	Very Unstable	Unstable	Unstable	Unstable	Moderately Stable
Thi-Qar	Very Unstable	Unstable	Moderately Stable	Unstable	Moderately Stable
Wassit	Very Unstable	Unstable	Unstable	Unstable	Unstable

Very Unstable
  Unstable
  Moderately Stable
  Stable
  Very Stable

Note: Polling for the SDR this quarter occurred in January 2011, prior to the outbreak of unrest that swept through the Middle East.

Source: U.S. Embassy-Baghdad, response to SIGIR data call, 4/1/2011.

SIGIR, Quarterly Report, April 2011, p. 76

Table 1 (Source: Center for Strategic and International studies)

This widespread instability has led to the distrust of their state institutions by Iraqi citizens, and has allowed tribal as well as religious sway to grow. As explained in the previous chapter, the adverse security conditions in Iraq, lack of legitimacy or efficacy, and the inability of state institutions to protect citizens in the face of security threats, has encouraged Iraqis to strengthen their tribal ties and resort to tribal customary law instead of state courts. In some cases, the U.S. military adopted a strategy to empower the tribes in order to gain their support in the fight against the insurgency (Asfura-Heim 2011).

Additionally, the electoral system in Iraq has meant that people with stronger social contacts can win elections, and that means that in order to win, politicians have to have the backing of tribal notables and religious leaders to match the necessary support in election campaigns, resulting in the increasing importance of tribal figures. On the other hand, as explained in Chapter Two, the old-established religious institutions such as Najaf seminary, which for decades was contained by the state (Rahimi 2007), have now gained enormous power in society, giving them the unique status of being able to influence social and political atmospheres. The Islamic militias and insurgents, on the other hand, have been able to capitalise on the power vacuum in the post-Saddam era and to impose their own version of Islam on people in many parts of the country (Williams, 2009). These developments have greatly influenced social life in the country. One of the areas that have seen tangible change is gender relations, since these groups have tried to encourage and to promote a more traditional patriarchal system.

This growth in influence of traditional institutions has been accompanied by an increasing emphasis on the importance of modern secular, individualistic and democratic values and norms. One of the channels that is introducing these values and norms is the media, as since 2003 Iraq has witnessed a remarkable integration into the processes of the globalisation of communications; a development that has introduced, mainly, what are perceived to be Western values into this deeply traditional society. These complicated and in some cases contradictory developments, seem to have taken Iraq in opposite directions. For example, modern ideas<sup>17</sup> around gender and sexuality are diffused through the media, while at the same time traditionalists, who have found the opportunity to consolidate their influence as a result of a foreign intervention, try to impose a very strict reading of gender and sexuality. They too use media as one of their tools to reach out to the population. This

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<sup>17</sup> These modern ideas are not necessarily emancipatory.

is an interesting phenomenon, and one that will be focused on throughout the remainder of this thesis.

### **3.5 Globalisation of Communications**

Processes of the globalisation of communication took hold in the nineteenth-century. Although transmitting messages across far regions has a much older history, it was not until the nineteenth century that communication networks started to be systematically organised on a global scale. The main driving force behind this phenomenon was the advent of new technologies, while other economic, political as well as military developments played a role in this process too. These new technologies “enabled communication to be dissociated from physical transportation” (Thompson 2001: 152) for the first time in the modern era.

Three major developments took place in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century that ushered in the globalisation of communications. The first development was the invention and expansion of underwater cable systems by the imperial European powers. Secondly, the establishment of international news agencies that “managed to monopolize the flow of news and form a cartel that divided up the world” (Machin and van Leeuwen 2007: 7). And finally, the use of electromagnetic waves and the creation of international organisations that are responsible for the allocation of the electromagnetic spectrum; a development that is still greatly relevant to global communication today, and one that has played important role in the intensification of the globalisation of communication by facilitating Direct Broadcast Satellite (DBS).

In 1837, Dr. C.G. Page of Massachusetts invented the first electromagnetic device, which converted electrical waves into sound (Winston 1998). Since then these waves have revolutionised the way human beings communicate and have enabled the development of new means of transmitting information such as telephone, radio, television, and satellite

communications. Electromagnetic waves allow the transmission of increasing quantities of information across large distances in a much more flexible and cost-efficient way, almost instantaneously without the need to extend fixed cables across sizable swathes of land or under sea. Another benefit that electromagnetic radiation brought is the fact that it is accessible by everyone who is within the range of signals, provided that they have the right equipment to receive them; a quality that helped expand the potential audience and receivers of the information to degrees that were never possible before.

As mentioned above, one of the technologies that uses electromagnetic waves to send information is satellite broadcasting, which in post-Saddam Iraq is amongst the most popular forms of media, especially in the absence of cable TV. Satellite TV is also much more popular than radio in Iraq (Gallup 2015). The launching of the first geo-stationary communication satellites in the 1960s expanded communication via electromagnetic waves to a global scope. The first DBS systems started to transmit programmes in 1975 in the US. By the early 1990s these systems were operating in other parts of the world, making communication truly global, due to the fact that they are transnational systems of distribution that are not limited inside the borders of nation states (Thompson, 2001). Satellite broadcasting created a market that soon attracted movies and TV programmes, mainly from the United States, to the new markets.

On the other hand, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and with the proliferation of the internet, the processes of globalisation of communication accelerated even more. The cold war era prior to 1989 witnessed the development of the Internet. “The 'Net' developed out of a system used in the Pentagon, the headquarters of the American military, from 1969” (Giddens 2009: 726). In the beginning it was a Pentagon project used to enable its staff to share their expensive equipment, but after a while some universities started enjoying the benefits of the internet. Finally, the internet became a commercialised

service, offered to other sectors in society. But it was not until the 1990s that the internet started expanding rapidly, connecting households and companies together. Internet access is not evenly distributed around the world. Wealthier countries in Europe, North America and the Far East are much better connected than poorer regions in Africa and the Middle East. Within one region the connection is not homogeneous either. In 1995, less than one percent of the population worldwide was connected to the internet; today the estimated number is 40 per cent. “The number of internet users has increased tenfold from 1999 to 2013” (Internet Live Stats, 2016a). This is according to a not very broad definition of internet user that defines them as an “individual who can access the Internet at home, via any device type and connection” (ibid), a solid proof that the internet has become an indispensable tool of the modern world that will quickly cover almost all of the world’s population.

In the MENA there are sharp disparities and a deep digital divide. Oil-rich countries such as Qatar and the UAE have much higher internet connection than, for example, the impoverished Yemen. However, one fact is clear: internet connections are on the rise in almost all regions and countries of the world, including MENA. This is in addition to the much expanded and popular satellite TV channels in the region.

### **3.6 Media as a Political and Cultural Forum in MENA**

For years, various regimes in MENA have shown great sensitivity towards public access to the ever-evolving media technologies in their countries. This alertness is particularly aimed at TV and the internet. TV has the ability to reach vast swathes of the population for a variety of reasons. Also, with the growth of satellite TV channels, citizens are exposed to discourses that are difficult to be modified by the state. On the other hand, the internet can facilitate communication between people and mobilise populations away from state surveillance. As stated in Chapter One this is why this thesis has focused on satellite TV and the internet.

### **3.6.1 The Expansion of DBS in MENA**

The 1990s witnessed the expansion of DBS in the region. The media environment in this decade is “characterized by media abundance, diversity, and globalism” (Ayish 2002: 138). In this decade the processes of ending forty years of state monopoly over media ownership started, with Lebanon being the first country to end the media monopoly. This process was intensified over the next decade, allowing for an abundance of commercial services to appear alongside the state-controlled media. On the other hand, the increasing affordability of TV sets and satellite TV receivers meant that the majority of the population in MENA have been able to acquire them. This becomes clearer when we know that there are hundreds of satellite TV channels available for free, including the very popular channels of the Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC), which introduced the first private Arab satellite TV in 1991. There are two models for providing free satellite TV in the region. One is the dual-product model. In this model the content is financed through revenues acquired through advertisements during programme breaks. In fact, this model let “television owners supply programmes to viewers as a means of supplying viewers to advertisers” (Sakr 2007: 4). In the second model, audiences are considered not as consumers, but as citizens. The governments, thus, run TV channels using public funds. In both of these models, viewers are not required to pay a subscription to be able to continue watching programmes, making TV content a very cheap product in MENA. The model of pay-TV is not very popular in the region, mainly because of the competition from free TV. Even when pay-TV acquires a monopoly over a specific type of programmes (such as popular football tournaments), people resort to techniques that are available at a cheap price that allow them to bypass the coding systems of the pay-TVs. As a result of these factors, it is normal for middle class urban Iraqis to possess multiple TV sets and Satellite TV receivers. One of the participants in this research stated that they have six of them at home. Iraq is far from the richest country in the

region, but still, TV ownership is close to 100%. Additionally, the sheer number of satellite TV programmes broadcast in Arabic (also in Farsi, Turkish and increasingly Kurdish), which is now in the hundreds, means that it can attract a variety of groups. Also, the diversity of programmes that have been available on TV 24 hours a day since the 1990s cater for a variety of cultural, social and economic backgrounds. On these TV channels one can find a wide variety of entertainment, news and current affairs, and religious content. Many of these programmes can easily attract less educated people, in a region with high illiteracy rates in some countries. As a result, TV has constructed “a national public space that addresses men and women, old and young, educated and poorly educated, urban and rural” (Sreberny 2005: 64). This picture is in sharp contrast with the relatively low TV set ownership of previous decades, and the total monopoly of the state over TV channel ownership. As will be shown below, during the 1990s, many countries in the region started to abandon their monopoly over TV channel ownership, opening the door for other players to enter the market. In fact, “the Middle East has moved from a situation of very limited access to television which was virtually all government controlled, to a market where there is a vast number of channels to choose between, often more than that of many European countries” (Callard 1997, cited in Sreberny- Mohammadi 1998: 179-180).

These developments, however, have not occurred across the whole region. The Islamic regime in Iran, for example, has never allowed private ownership of the media. It has also criminalised owning satellite TV receivers, in an effort to maintain its monopoly over TV channels. Although the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) started to broadcast satellite TV channels in foreign languages such as Arabic, English, Spanish, and also in Farsi for the Iranian diaspora, the regime maintained its policy of banning Satellite TV inside the country. It is important to bear in mind that this policy has greatly failed and that millions of Iranians, including people considered to be part of the regime or close to it, consume satellite



TV at home and the sporadic campaigns to ‘eradicate’ satellite receivers have greatly failed (Sepehri and Salehi 2015). The ban in pre-2003 Iraq, however, was much more successful and Iraqi people, with the exception of the post-1991 Kurdistan region, only had access to a limited number of state-owned channels. In some other parts of MENA, the picture is very different. Lebanon, for example, was the first to move away from the citizen approach to media and adopted a much more liberal and market-oriented approach towards TV ownership, where audiences were regarded as customers.

The first years of the expansion of satellite TV in the Middle East, was accompanied with the hope that this development would challenge the status quo and trigger socio-political change in the region. This line of thought concerning the media is not a new one. The paradigm of media and development that came out of Daniel Lerner’s controversial book ‘The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East’ (1958) talks about the modernisation and democratisation of the Middle East, and the pivotal role that the media plays in this regard. The book has received serious critique in academic circles, mainly due to its unilinear and stagist model that ignores all the cultural complexities of the countries under study (Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria), while imposing the historic developments of the West on these societies. This model considers the media to be a liberating, modernising and democratising force. It stresses that the spread of the media in traditional societies with autocratic regimes makes people familiar with the modern world and gives them ideas about how to ask for developments in their own countries. Also, the fact that people can participate in public spaces facilitated by media is a factor that will help people to fight the autocratic regimes and establish democracies in these countries. This research intentionally avoids this model; it endeavours to consider media consumption in the specific cultural and historical context of Iraqi society in the post-Saddam era.

The excitement that came with the expansion of satellite TV in the 1990s, however, was soon replaced by the feeling that this expansion is in the benefit of the elite and not necessarily democratising. The ruling elites were the people who had the resources to make use of this technology, to pursue their own goals and agendas.

In theory, the technology of cross-border broadcasting allowed viewers to see material critical of governments and to take part in uncensored public debates. In practice, there was no sudden rush to exploit such freedom, as the resources required for transnational broadcasting initially put the activity out of reach of almost everyone outside the existing ruling elites (Sakr 2004: 2).

However, one cannot ignore the fact that the new environment allowed more players to enter the media market with a variety of objectives, contributing towards the competition at a level never before seen in the region. With viewers enjoying more choices, producers have been pushed to produce programmes that are more interactive and relevant to the viewers' lives, resulting in people's voices being heard in the media like never before. Additionally, the increasing competition from satellite TV placed pressure on governments to change the regulations of media ownership to remove the state monopoly over terrestrial TV as well. In the mid-2000s, a trend started to emerge across the monarchies and the republics in the region to change the regulations and end the state monopoly over media ownership and control. In practice, however, many governments restricted the license to launch TV to a limited number of people who were mainly connected to the ruling elite, preventing dissenting voices from having an independent public space on TV (Sakr 2009). As a result, during the 2000s, there was still a limited ownership base in the region. This is the same trend that has been going on for decades in the MENA where governments view the media

as a threat to their power. Media is seen as a public space that can empower dissenting groups and help them recruit followers, by challenging the formal narrative presented by the state, and also helping them to organise their anti-establishment activities, especially through the internet, as will be discussed below. Although the days of the old style state monopoly where a very limited numbers of channels were completely controlled and operated by the state are gone, and new technologies such as DBS pose new challenges to governments to fight anti-establishment and alternative narratives, governments are still very concerned with the content available to their citizens.

### **3.6.2 Internet in MENA**

The dynamics around the internet are, however, different. To begin with, the technology is more expensive, and it is more difficult for many people from poorer backgrounds to acquire computers, tablets or smartphones, and also to pay for the internet connection which in many countries in the region, including Iraq, is more expensive than in developed countries. Also, in order to be able to use the internet, one needs to have the know-how of computers and internet usage, which is sophisticated for less educated people. This explains why the internet is mainly used by younger and more educated people who are from middle class and urban backgrounds. As a result of these factors, internet penetration in the region is much lower than satellite TV access rates. It is also much more uneven than satellite TV access. In rich countries of the Persian Gulf, internet penetration in 2016 reached 92% of the population, in countries such as Bahrain or UAE, while in poor countries is much lower- in Yemen it barely reached 25% (Internet World Stats 2016). The lower accessibility of the internet, at least in some parts of MENA, does not mean that MENA regimes are less concerned with people's free access to the internet, as internet provides capacities that are not available on TV. Not only does the internet allow access to news and information that is

not available through state supported channels, and therefore like satellite TV it helps alternative narratives critical of status quo to circulate, but it also allows users to organise for collective action. This organising capability is particularly important, as it was seen in the Iranian Green Movement of 2009 and the Arab Spring that started in 2011. It also allows citizens to report to the traditional media through apps such as Skype. Before the age of the internet and the development of social networking apps such as Viber, WhatsApp, Skype, Facebook messenger, and so on, only people such as journalists who had access to satellite broadcasting systems were able to broadcast live on the ground for TV channels. These apps, however, have made it possible for citizens with an internet connected device to be able to broadcast live events on the grounds, and also give live video interviews to TV channels, transmitting the information from the local to the international level. Facebook and Twitter have also recently added features that allow users to live broadcast to friends and followers. All these features and capabilities provide the opportunity for citizens to make their voices heard like never before, and to engage with a large audience, something that was previously exclusive to the few. The internet, along with satellite TV, has helped with the emergence of a public sphere that is able to erode the government's ability to monopolise information. This is not to say that the full potential of the internet has been unleashed, and that activists can capitalise on the internet in a hassle-free environment. Governments in the region have put strategies in place to curtail citizens' ability to bypass state boundaries. Even so, while the internet has definitely been one of the drivers of change, it is important to bear in mind that states have also been able to use the internet (and other media technologies) to their own end (Lynch 2011: 307).

The Green Movement in Iran witnessed heavy internet usage by the protesters who would post footages of the demonstrations and the crack down that followed, using social media websites. This was the first time this amount of footage was available on public unrest

since the 1980s. As journalists, including foreign journalists, were barred from covering the demonstrations, traditional media relied heavily on the new media content provided by citizen journalists to cover the events (Shirky 2011). Social media in particular turned to public spaces where citizens who rarely had access to the regime-controlled media made their voices, concerns and aspirations heard. They were able to participate in political life, by posting news, footage and banners, and discussing the events. Social media became a platform for instantaneous and continuous flows of news and information that bypassed borders, showing the world what was happening on the ground at an unprecedented speed. This helped the diaspora to participate in political events inside the country as never before, and to connect with people inside the country in protest. But also, it enabled protesters' voices to be heard in other parts of the world such as the US and the UK. Additionally, protesters would use social media to organise their activities, to determine places the protests would start from and the strategies to be used during the protest. In one case, the activists decided that the protest would be silent and so they posted information about the time, place and strategy of the protest on social media.

Similar strategies were used in the Arab Spring, where activists turned to citizen journalists and social media became one of the main news and information sources for traditional media (Lotan, *et al.* 2011). In Libya, pictures of the peaceful demonstrations of people in Benghazi combined with the threat of Gaddafi to go after them 'zanga zanga' and catch them like rats, played an important role in mobilising public opinion, not only across the region but around the world. It can be argued that this made the decision about NATO's military intervention easier for the leaders, showing the importance of the internet and social media in these events. This is not to say that revolutions and demonstrations happen because of the media, or that media usage alone toppled the regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen and seriously challenged the Syrian regime. It is not to give all the credit to the media

and call these uprisings the Twitter revolutions, as some have done, but to emphasise that the new media has created spaces and possibilities that did not exist before for the activists and the public to challenge the status quo, and causing the autocratic regimes to come up with new solutions to counter this phenomenon. The Islamic Republic regime in Iran, for example, clearly sees the internet as a threat to its hegemony; a medium that gives dissidents a platform for public participation. As a result, the regime has fought hard to deny them this space. It is, however, important to note that the reaction to the advent of media technologies has not been a simple rejection. Even the most closed regimes of the region, Saddam's Hussein Ba'ath regime, provided access to a very limited number of Iraqi citizens with close ties to the regime in the early 2000s. In the case of Iran, as Khiabany and Sreberny show, the regime has a "desire to orchestrate and manage the slow development of the private sector and the inhibitions placed on entrepreneurial ICT activity in a field that has made Internet millionaires in other parts of the world" (2009: 196). It has also realised the potential of the internet as a propaganda tool for the regime, as it has done with satellite TV. Powerful factions inside the regime, such as the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, which is not merely a military and security force, but has a huge presence in the economic activities of the country, are well aware that without the internet it is very difficult to maintain a rigorous economic policy in an increasingly globalised world. They have also realised the importance of the internet in diffusing science, something the regime is keen to improve in many areas, including its nuclear and missile programmes. By controlling the virtual environment, the regime hopes to benefit from these advantages that the internet provides, while denying the dissident voices a platform to express themselves. Despite all the concerted efforts of the Iranian regime to monopolise the traditional and new media environment, through internet censorship and criminalising possessing satellite TV receivers, Iranians have been able to increasingly use media technologies as channels for political and cultural participation,

sometimes paying a heavy price, such as imprisonment.

### **3.6.3 Media and Cultural Protectionism in MENA**

Political mobilisation is not the only threat MENA regimes feel when it comes to media technology. Cultural protectionism is also at the heart of the concerns of some of the regimes. Political activities that challenge the regimes are treated more or less in a similar manner across the region. Suppression, oppression, political exclusion, denying them the public space and media are policies implemented by autocratic regimes across the region to maintain the status quo and consolidate their power. The cultural policies pursued by these regimes, however, vary widely. Since the revolution of 1979, the Iranian regime has pursued a policy of cultural protectionism aimed at countering the ‘cultural invasion’ of the West and a return to ‘authentic’ Iranian-Islamic culture. The two aims of the cultural policy of the new state are based on the destruction of an imposed “Western” and “alien” culture, and its replacement with a dignified, indigenous, and authentic Islamic culture, which they claimed had declined under the previous monarchical regime” (Khiabany and Sreberny 2009: 201). Thirty-seven years after the revolution, this struggle is still at the heart of the rhetoric of the Iranian regime. Using a variety of methods and investing huge resources, the regime and organisations with close ties to the regime such as the Qum Seminary, have tried to provide an alternative to Western cultural products and narratives. Media is an important aspect in this struggle. It is seen as a backdoor through which Western imperialism tries to dominate the nation, by indoctrinating the nation through media, leaving a ‘hollow’ culture not able to resist the erosion of the authentic Iranian-Islamic traditions of the country. This concern with media, however, is seen to be linked more to the first one (the political use of media), as political activists and dissidents have always been accused of following a Western agenda. So, even the cultural concerns around the media are linked to the fear of changing the status

quo and challenging the regime; hence the need to monitor and control the internet, as well as other forms of media.

Other countries in the region, however, have taken a different path. Successive Egyptian governments, for example, showed less sensitivity towards Western influence. This is especially true about the post-Nasser era when the state's cultural policies encouraged the privatisation of the art market and the promotion of liberal culture (Winegar 2006), which is widely viewed as Western by more conservative sections of society, such as the Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood. I want to emphasise that there is a need to avoid simplistic explanations of these phenomena and processes that are going on in the region. For example, although the formal rhetoric of the Iranian regime since the 1979 revolution has been an anti-Western one in all areas, including culture, many processes have been going on during these years that can be considered to be Western. The problem lies in determining what Western itself actually means. There have always been differences between different factions within the regime about what constitutes Western. These are people and organisations who took part in the revolution and are part of the regime, yet in many cases they cannot agree which cultural practices are acceptable. For example, for years there has been a struggle between the reformists/moderate faction and the conservatives around music concerts. While President Rouhani's government is willing to allow singers to hold concerts in a relatively smooth way, conservatives tried to stop them. But one needs to be also careful about this dichotomy. There are policies implemented by the conservatives themselves, which used to be frowned upon by conservatives and the clergy, as being Western. IRIB, which is run by conservatives and is under direct control of the Supreme Leader, has implemented a free market advertisement policy. This attitude towards revenue making was frowned upon for years and considered decadent, as it encourages Western consumerism.

The debate about Western cultural influence and preserving the 'authentic' national



culture is not peculiar to the Islamic regime in Iran. This debate has been going on amongst political activists, intellectuals and artists from all political spectrums in the region. This is also a matter of concern for people from all backgrounds and not limited to the ruling or cultural elites. Media is at the heart of this debate. The increasing intensification of the processes involving the globalisation of communications makes this debate even more heated. Media is viewed as the transmitter of Western culture, and the influence of Hollywood and American Television entertainment on the media industry is undeniable. People across MENA have embraced Western or what they perceive as Westernised media contents. Millions of people watch Hollywood movies, and many, especially amongst the youth, are fans of Hollywood stars. They watch American dramas and entertainment programmes brought to them by tens of satellite TV channels for free. Even so, they are worried about the influence of these media products on their culture. They do not want to lose their ‘authentic’ culture. There is a growing concern over “culturally sensitive programming,” an issue which is claimed to enjoy government and public agreement: “the biggest concern from open access to highly attractive and superior quality programming from the outside world is fear of its effect on the national language and the values and traditions of the society” (Al-Umran 1996: 22, cited in Sreberny 2005: 63).

This research focuses on the cultural aspect of media consumption in Iraq (as opposed to media as a public sphere for socio-political transformations) and it presents evidence of public concern about the ‘authentic’ culture, and the traditions and values of the society that are seen as being threatened by Western or Westernised media contents brought about by the globalisation of communication. It also shows that members of the elites, such as politicians, are voicing similar concerns. The focus of this research is on gender relations, at it shows that although Iraqi people are embracing media technologies in the post-Saddam era, they have real concerns about the influence of media on their gender culture.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

Globalisation has transformed the world we live in. Iraq was largely isolated from the globalisation processes as a result of the autocratic nature of the regime, but equally the UN sanctions in the 1990s. the 2003 regime change reconnected Iraq to these globalised processes. Modern technology, including communication technology, has played a significant role in the intensification of the processes of globalisation. These technologies have changed the concept of the public sphere. In MENA the media environment was transformed since the 1990s. the regimes in the region used to have absolute monopoly over media ownership. The introduction of satellite TV and commercial TV and also the advent of the internet transformed this scene. The autocratic regimes of MENA have always been wary of this public space, as they fear that dissidents use them to counter the narrative of their regimes. As a result, they have always strived to monitor and control the public sphere. Media technologies have created new public spaces. This is viewed by regimes in the region as a challenge. While they use media to disseminate their own narrative, they fear that the public sphere created by the media enables other voices to bypass state boundaries. This was certainly the case in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, but the invasion of 2003 changed the equation in Iraq and the new regime is not as concerned with the public sphere created by the media as it was before. There is, however, another source of concern for the elites in the region, including Iraq. This is the cultural 'influence' of the West creating challenges through the media. This concern is shared by the public in Iraq, and that the main concern is in regard to the culture of gender, and the values and traditions around it. The next chapter will discuss gender relations in Iraq, in particular demonstrating how tradition shapes gender in this country.

## **Chapter 4: Gender Relations in Iraq**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In Chapter Two, I argued that the traditional institutions of tribe and religion play a significant role in many aspects of Iraqi society, to the extent that they rival the modern institutions of the state. This chapter will examine the extent to which, and the way in which, these traditional institutions and the values they promote shape gender relations in Iraq. Gender relations in the majority of known human societies are and have been shaped by patriarchal structures. These structures, which are based on unequal power relations, function in a way that ensures men's dominance over women and children, but they are far from homogeneous. Like any other social structures, patriarchal structures are fluid and prone to change. Sometimes they are challenged by opposing forces and retreat in their influence, and sometimes they transform and take a different form, yet remain influential. Patriarchal structures in Iraq have also witnessed transformations since the establishment of modern Iraq in 1921. The various socio-political and economic developments of the last 100 years have transformed many notions around gender relations in the country; yet Iraq remains a deeply patriarchal society. This chapter will examine gender relations in Iraq, starting with a review of the literature on patriarchy. It will then present a brief overview of gender relations in ancient Arabia in order to track the traces of centuries-old social structures that till the present day have had a strong presence in Iraqi society. As the story of gender relations in Iraq is not one of tradition only, the theme will turn to modern currents that have to some extent been transforming gender relations since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The section will explore how in their effort to modernise the nation, successive Iraqi regimes have tried to undermine the traditional institutions that promote Iraqi patriarchy. As autocratic regimes, they attempted to weaken this form of patriarchy in the name of

emancipating women and freeing them from ‘reactionary’ traditions, but they in fact introduced another form of patriarchy: one that is for the benefit of the regime and a form of dependence upon the state. It will be shown how the regimes have used gender relations as a bargaining chip to further their goals. The main part of this chapter is designated to investigate Iraqi patriarchy. This section will demonstrate how the tribal concept of *ird*, and its pertinent codes and values, work with other patriarchal sites to sustain men’s ascendancy over women. I will argue that sexuality is the main site of Iraqi patriarchy. Sexuality is supported by other sites, such as violence, culture and the state. I argue that *ird*, through denying women their sexual agency, works as hegemonic masculine system in order to sustain patriarchy and undermine their agency in almost all aspects of their lives.

## **4.2 Patriarchy**

Iraq is a deeply patriarchal society where there are clear and deep gender inequalities that allow men to dominate women in a variety of social, economic as well as political arenas. The literal meaning of patriarchy is rule by the fathers. Before the advent of radical feminism in the late 1960s, the term was used mainly by anthropologists who were interested in studying “Old Testament-type pastoral nomads” (Jaggar 1983: 102). In these societies, the main social unit comprises of a family in which an older man possesses absolute power over the rest of family members who are normally wives, children, herds and other dependents, including younger men. Radical feminists, however, give the term a much broader meaning; for them, patriarchy refers to “all systems of male dominance” (Jaggar 1983: 103). The nature and the root cause of these systems of male dominance, however, is a contested issue. Walby emphasises that patriarchy is “a system of social structures and practices” (1997: 20). She is keen to avoid the more biological determinist view of patriarchy by emphasising the social aspect of patriarchy and equally talking about the structures involved, which can be

defined as “[e]nduring or widespread patterns among social relations” (Connell 2009: 10). This viewpoint of patriarchy emphasises the social and cultural role in shaping one’s gender, and sees ideas about masculinity and femininity as “part of the actions which go to make up the patriarchal structure” (Walby 1997: 90).

The French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir’s famous quotation encapsulates this viewpoint eloquently. “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (De Beauvoir 1956: 273). Although de Beauvoir did not use the term gender in her famous book ‘The Second Sex’, her ideas of the centrality of culture in shaping the power relations between men and women have greatly shaped the second wave feminism, which started to have an influence on gender relation debates in Britain, France and the US from the 1960’s onwards (Rahman and Jackson 2010). Different strands of second wave feminism- liberal, socialist and radical- have played a role in the development of the concept of gender. If sex is seen as biologically given, determined by genitalia, hormones and procreation functions, gender is culturally constructed in a way that divides people into two strands: masculine or feminine. Therefore, masculinity and femininity are viewed as social attributes rather than natural ones (See also, Oakley 1985; Abercrombie *et al.* 2006; Butler 1986). By taking this stance, one must agree that “[b]eing a man or a woman, then, is not a pre-determined state. It is a becoming, a condition actively under construction” (Connell 2009: 5). This viewpoint is in deep disagreement with the one that explains gender on the basis of a presumed biological and/or psychological divide that exists between males and females.

If one agrees with the social definition of gender, it does not necessarily follow that the construction of gender, which starts in childhood, is necessarily imposed on people from outside by social codes or authorities or other pressures. People play an active role in obtaining their desired gender identity. They construct their identity as masculine or feminine. We as individuals “claim a place in the gender order – or respond to the place we

have been given - by the way we conduct ourselves in everyday life” (Connell 2009: 6). Therefore, gender arrangements can be a source of pleasure, but also of harm and inequality, as we will see later in this chapter. Hence, gender is intrinsically political.

One of the most important implications of taking this stance is that there is nothing natural about gender, and this includes gender inequality. Hence, “[t]he division of labour and the hierarchy between men and women, therefore, began to be accorded a cultural character” (Delphy 1993: 2). It is culture that has historically defined what men and women could become and dictated the domination of men through the exclusion of women from power, education, work, and so on, and by being sure to control many aspects of women’s lives, including sexuality.

Consequently, in order to understand gender inequality, it is necessary to look for the cause root of patriarchy in areas other than human biology. Walby argues that on a less abstract level there is no one single patriarchal structure; rather, in order to understand patriarchy one needs to look at six different structures. These are “the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions” (1997: 20). These patriarchal sites and structures do not operate in abstract of other ones; rather, they influence each other in a variety of manners. They sometimes reinforce and support each other, and work in the same direction in order to sustain men’s dominance.

Some thinkers believe that the theory of patriarchy is seriously challenged in modern societies, due to rapid developments in family structures and “the rise of an informational, global economy, technological changes in the reproduction of the human species, and the powerful surge of women’s struggles, and of a multifaceted feminist movement” (Castells 2010: 193). Women were massively incorporated in paid work, increasing their bargaining power in relation to men. The transformation of women’s consciousness has also played a

key role in this development. Kandiyoti (1988) argues that the classic patriarchy which “lies in the operations of the patrilocally extended household” (in which older men dominate women and younger men), (278) is crumbling “under the impact of new market forces, capital penetration in rural areas” (281). This, she argues, leads to the demise of the domination of older men over younger men and women, as these forces render men’s economic protection of women a myth.

In this thesis, I argue that the concept of patriarchy is very much relevant in the Iraqi context. Iraqi society is still largely a tribal society with emphasised kin relations. ‘Patrilocally extended households’, are prevalent in Iraq. It is true that due to economic developments in contemporary Iraq, increasing numbers of Iraqi women have been incorporated into paid work. Yet, only 14% of Iraqi women are either working or actively seeking employment (United Nations Joint Analysis Unit Iraq 2012), whilst the vast majority of Iraqi women still take traditional responsibilities. This renders most women still dependent on men’s economic protection. As I showed before, even during the periods of war, when lack of male labour forced the state to incorporate increasing number of women into paid work, the notion of women’s subordination to men did not change. This is especially true when considering that according to the system of honour, almost all aspects of a woman’s life is controlled by male kin to protect the honour and reputation of the family. This gives men the power to control women’s right to work, threatening to deprive them from this right in the event of disobedience.

As for the idea of ‘transformation of women’s consciousness’, I would argue that while new ideas about women’s roles in a modern society have reached Iraqi society, particularly after the regime change of 2003 and the opening up of media environment, as I show in the following chapters, the ‘realities of life’ have greatly prevented women from asking for new rights in Iraqi society. Also, as many patriarchal concepts in Iraq are associated with moral

values and religious codes, many women find it hard to break away from them, preventing a transformation in their consciousness. As I will show later many of my female participants did not believe in gender equality and think of themselves as subordinate to men. This is why I use the concept of patriarchy to explain gender relations in Iraq.

Although patriarchy is a system of gender domination, it is important to note that there is not one single type of patriarchy. Depending on temporal and geographical situations, patriarchy can have a variety of forms. Additionally, the degree of the power of patriarchy is also subject to change from society to society and from one epoch to another. This chapter will focus on post-Saddam Iraqi patriarchy. This is a type of patriarchy that is prevalent in Iraq. This is a patriarchy that is supported, prompted and promoted by religious, tribal values and is observed and implemented mainly by male kin. In heavily tribal communities, the extended family (even remote cousins) can have a say on how the values and concepts around this patriarchy must be observed. In other communities, male members of the nuclear family only are involved. In this thesis, this type of patriarchy will be referred to as Iraqi patriarchy. Although there are other notions of patriarchy that have been promoted by successive Iraqi regimes over the past 100 years that rival this traditional patriarchy, the main focus will remain on the form of patriarchy explained above. In addition, similar values and concepts can be found in many other societies, particularly those of the MENA region, thus, calling this form of patriarchy Iraqi does not exclude other societies. I argue that sexuality is the major site for Iraqi patriarchy. However, there are other areas of Iraqi patriarchy, such as patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions, which work hand in hand with the main site in order to promote and reinforce patriarchal order.



#### **4.2.1 Sexuality**

Centuries old concepts and values around sexuality are key to understanding Iraqi patriarchy. In order to explain these long-lasting qualities that shape Iraqi gender relations, some discussion of historical accounts and developments are necessary. As a result, this section will draw on theories of evolutionary psychology as well as biosocial theory.

Some theorists believe that sexuality is the foundation of men's domination over women (MacKinnon 1982). For example, some evolutionary psychologists have argued that "male power over women so often revolves around female sexuality" (Smuts 1995: 2), and that male sexual control is a universal phenomenon and the root of patriarchy. Evolutionary psychology maintains that sex-specific psychological dispositions shape sex-differentiated social behaviours. These psychological dispositions were presumably built into the human species through genetically mediated adaptation to primeval conditions (Wood and Eagly 2002). Different reproductive pressures that ancestral males and females faced throughout the history of the human species are responsible for the existing sex differences in behaviour, according to this theory. Trivers (1972), explains how the imbalances in parental investment are key to understanding current male and female behaviours. The term parental investment refers to the "time and effort spent producing germ cells, and in incubating and protecting eggs and young" (Archer and Lloyd 2002: 44). Evolutionary psychologists state that the sexual selection pressures that are responsible for psychological sex differences appeared due to an imbalance in the sexes' parental investment. Females invest more than males in their offspring, through gestation and nursing, and therefore became selective about potential mates, and preferred mates who were inclined to invest more in supporting them and their offspring, for example by providing resources. On the other hand, men developed a less choosy tendency in their mating strategy, because they invested much less in offspring. This brought about competition between ancestral males over sexual access to females.

According to evolutionary psychology, this competition is the reason why men tend to be more aggressive, competitive and risk taking.

On the other hand, due to females' internal fertilisation, ancestral males did not have paternity certainty. Therefore, to make sure they were investing in their own biological offspring, so the argument goes, men "developed a disposition to control women's sexuality and to experience sexual jealousy" (Wood and Eagly 2002: 700). The more resources males invest in their mates and their children, the more concerned they become with paternity certainty, and tend to ensure that the children in whom they are investing are their own. This in turn increases their motivation to control their mates' sexuality (Dickemann 1981). According to evolutionary psychology, therefore, female sexual control by males and sexual double standards is a universal disposition developed due to sexual selection pressures.

However, evidence from the cross cultural analysis of the behaviour of men and women, shows that although sexual jealousy and double standards restrict women more so than men and is common in many societies around the world, it is not a form of universal cross-cultural conduct. In some societies, women engaging in extramarital sex is not only widespread, but an accepted norm. Norms such as wife sharing is common practice in some societies in the world, and this challenges the assumptions made by evolutionary psychology "that men's evolved disposition to ensure paternity certainty underlies a universal tendency for men to control women's sexuality" (Wood and Eagly 2002: 715).

Biosocial theory, which "focuses on the interactive relations between the physical attributes of men and women and the social contexts in which they live" (Wood and Eagly 2002: 701), presents a more convincing explanation of female sexual restrictions. It argues that economic benefits are behind the consolidation of control over women's sexuality. This happens "[w]hen children yield economic benefits for men" (Wood and Eagly 2002: 716) and hence paternity certainty makes economic sense. In these circumstances men tend to

restrict women's sexual conduct. The importance of the economic dimension in female sexual control receives support from Reiss's (1986) findings for 80 societies in the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample. It shows that several indexes of patriarchy (e.g., patrilineal inheritance, patrilocal residence, importance of private property) predict the tendency of husbands towards manifesting sexual jealousy (see also Hupka & Ryan 1990). Private property is particularly important in explaining several aspects of patriarchy, including male sexual jealousy.

On the other hand, classic Marxism posits that some economic developments, including the ownership of private property, are behind the oppression of women. This view argues that control of goods helped establish paternal rights to children and patrilineal inheritance (Engels 2010). In his classic book 'The status of women in preindustrial societies' (1978/2015) Whyte examines 93 nonindustrial societies and concludes that sexual control over women is associated with ownership of private property among other factors. The ownership of private property gives importance to paternity certainty when "property is inherited through male lines, and control over women's sexuality becomes one way for men to ensure such certainty and consequent economic advantage" (Wood and Eagly 2002: 715). Therefore, it is fair to say that control of female sexuality appeared with the development of particular economic structures, especially those in which inheritance ran through male lines. As will be seen later, the advent of private property ownership in ancient Arabia consolidated male sexual jealousy through the development of the concept of *ird*, which is fundamental to MENA and Iraqi patriarchy.

#### **4.2.2 Culture**

Sexuality is not the only site for patriarchy in Iraq. The preponderate sexual double standards, which allow male supremacy to continue in Iraq, are reinforced by cultural

institutions such as religion and tribe. This is not peculiar to Iraq. Culture constitutes an important structure that is “composed of a set of institutions which create the representation of women within a patriarchal gaze in a variety of arenas, such as religions, education and the media” (Walby 1997: 21).

Without the support of culture as a major patriarchal site, patriarchy would not be able to function as effectively as it does at the moment in Iraq. Cultural notions of femininities and masculinities can be found in various aspects of social life. Patriarchal discourses are created and maintained in a variety of cultural texts. In the case of Iraq, the main texts that inform Iraqi culture are religious texts as well as tribal ones. These traditional cultural institutions (that also take on a political role) are very powerful and efficient in Iraq, as shown before, shaping many aspects of Iraqi people’s lives, whether through the spread of cultural values or through their unique judicial powers. Some of these cultural texts are written, as will be shown below, whereas some are oral, constructing a discourse in which the ‘appropriate masculinities and femininities’ are propagated in society. The language used in these texts is a masculine one, as the leaders of these institutions are all male, and it propagates a masculine view of the world, particularly when it comes to women’s sexuality. In these texts, the sexual double standards that allow men to restrict women’s sexuality, as well as other aspects of their lives, are promoted and justified.

#### **4.2.3 Violence**

Violence forms another basis of patriarchy in Iraq and many other societies around the world. Gendered violence towards women that aims at dominating them is widespread around the world, and women are sufficiently aware of it in a way that makes them modify their behaviour: “...the effect of violence on women’s behavior is mediated by women’s fear of violence as well as the actuality of it” (Walby 1997: 140).

Honour related violence is a reality of everyday life for women in Iraq. Even a rumour about the violation of sexual honour by a woman may result in serious violence against her. “Within the context of this restrictive way of life for girls and women lurked the specter of honor killings. Most of my female interlocutors who were of childbearing age (but not those younger or older) seemed to live in constant fear of them” (King 2008: 322).

Later I will show how the threat of violence, or the use of it, functions as basis for men in Iraq to make sure that women’s sexuality is controlled in a way that assures male ascendancy.

#### **4.2.4 State**

Central to the continuation of violence and its role as the basis for patriarchy is the state. As explained in the previous section, male violence is critical in the maintenance of the oppression of women. The state’s reaction to this violence is an important indicator of another site of patriarchy, the state. In the case of male violence against females: “lack of intervention of ...the state condemns women to subordination” (Walb 1997: 157). This lack of intervention by state institutions to deal with cases of honour related violence in Iraq is explained later on in this chapter. It is important to note that some of the functions that are expected to be performed by a modern state are actually partially controlled by the traditional authorities and institutions of tribe and religion. Tribe and religion can play a policing as well as judicial role in Iraq. Not only do these institutions not use their policing and judicial powers to intervene and restrict cases of violence against women, they sometimes use these powers to promote it.

I am not restricting Iraqi patriarchal sites to the one explained above, rather I argue that sexuality is the main site, and culture, violence and state are supportive of sexuality as a patriarchal site in Iraq. Sexuality, as an important dimension of gender relations, is

specifically important for traditional authorities and institutions, and is strictly regulated through a set of values and customs introduced and enforced by tribe (including its smallest segment, the traditional family) and religion. One of these cultural concepts is *ird*. *Ird* is one of the connotations of the concept of honour<sup>18</sup> in Iraq (and indeed many other Arab and Muslim societies). Honour is a key concept in gender relations in Iraq and it is certainly not possible to research this field without understanding what role honour plays in these relations.

*Ird* is a pre-Islamic tribal concept that can refer to different meanings and manners. One of the most prominent of its connotations, however, is related to the sexual conduct of female members of a male's family (Khayyat 1990) and their chastity and continence. *Ird* and the social concepts, cultural values, customs, moral codes and customary laws around it are developed (as will be explained later) in a way that allows a sexual double-standard to become prevalent in society and males to control females' sexuality, that is, to ensure their 'premarital *virginity* and marital *fidelity*' (Dickemann 1981: 417, italic in original). This makes sexuality the main site for patriarchy in Iraq. *Ird* and its pertinent concepts work as a system to sustain patriarchy. I call it a 'system' because it does not stand on its own, but works in conjunction with other concepts with which it forms a set, for example *ghira* and *áar*. But it also is supported and promoted by other patriarchal sites such as cultural institutions and also by the state.

Before going into detail about these concepts, gender relations in Iraq will be discussed, starting with a quick look at Ancient Arabia. The reason for starting with this period in time is that both the main traditional institutions in Iraq, tribe and religion, have historically been shaped by currents from Arabia to a great extent. The invasion of the lands

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<sup>18</sup> The other equivalent is *Sharaf* that refers to a wider sense of honour, including *ird*. Sometimes *Sharf* is used as the equivalent of *ird*.

that comprise today's Iraq by Muslims who came from Arabia had a lasting influence on this country as it is evident from the dominance of Arabic language and the religion of Islam in Iraq. Next, the transformation of gender relations since the establishment of the country in 1921 will be discussed in more detail.

### **4.3 Gender Relations in Ancient Arabia**

In the fifth century Arabia, before the time of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (circa 570), there were a variety of arrangements around gender. Unlike other countries in the broader region where patrilineal, patriarchal marriage was the sole legitimate form of marriage, matrilineal, matrilineal, polyandrous marriages were among the types of marriages practiced in Arabia<sup>19</sup>.

Watt (1956) argues that at the time Arabia was undergoing a social evolution into a patrilineal society for two main reasons: Firstly, the increasing importance of commerce in Mecca during the fifth and sixth centuries, and secondly, due to the fact that the Quraish, Prophet Muhammad's tribe, which was Meccas's most important tribe, was increasingly choosing a sedentary lifestyle. These transformations resulted in the breakdown of tribal values, including the concept of communal property and the rise of a new economic order, including private property. The rise of private property resulted in the increasing importance of paternity certainty, as men wished to pass on their property to their biological children. This "led eventually to the displacement of matriliy by patriliney" (Ahmed 1992: 43). In addition to the internal dynamics that influenced the evolving of gender relations in Arabia, external factors also played a significant role in the transformation of Arabian society into a patrilineal society. The infiltration of Iranian, Syrian and Byzantine cultures exposed Arabia

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<sup>19</sup> This does not necessarily indicate an absence of misogyny, but it correlates with the fact that women enjoyed greater sexual choices before the advent of Islam.

gender culture to these neighbouring societies.

A form of monotheism, characteristic of the predominant religions in these adjoining regions, as well as patrilineal marriage, in which men controlled women's sexuality had also begun to gain ground in a hitherto polytheistic Arabia before Muhammad began to preach Islam (Ahmed 1992: 45).

The advent of Islam helped consolidate this patriarchal system, making paternity certainty even more important, and resulting in the increased importance of control over women's sexuality. Islam did not necessarily bring a new system that completely abolished the cultural values and practices of pre-Islamic Arabia. In fact, many Islamic rules were actually cultural values and forms of conduct practiced widely in pre-Islamic Arabia. Prophet Muhammad abolished some of these pre-Islamic practices and ratified others, unifying the scattered and various codes practiced by different tribes under one umbrella- Islam. With regard to gender relations, Islam abolished<sup>20</sup> sanctioned customs found among some Arabian tribes and legitimised only one type of marriage; Islamic marriage<sup>21</sup> is a patriarchal, patrilineal, polygamous marriage that was practiced in pre-Islamic Arabia by some tribes, including Muhammad's tribe, the Quraish. With the advent of Islam, this patriarchal institution, which is based on "the vesting in the male of proprietary rights to female sexuality" (ibid), turned to a holy religious code that has been passed down to Muslim societies for centuries.

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<sup>20</sup> This does not mean that all the tribal customs that were abolished by Islam disappeared, as many gender-specific tribal customs practiced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and even practiced nowadays are considered un-Islamic by Islamic jurists (See: *فقه العشائر*, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Islamic traditional patriarchal family shapes women's life to a great extent, including their social roles. Hence I am focusing on marriage to explain Islamic gender culture. Another important aspect of the advent and the subsequent expansion of Islam in the Middle East, which is key to understanding Islamic gender culture, is the right to acquire concubines. I am not focusing on this aspect of Islamic gender culture because this practice is obsolete and illegal in areas that are under the control of the central government in Baghdad and KRG. Since June 2014, the Islamic State however has allowed men to acquire concubines in areas under its control in Iraq.



For centuries Islam was one of the main sources that informed gender relations in the MENA societies. The emergence of modern currents in the region have changed this equation by introducing new ideas about gender relations. “The meaning of gender as elaborated by establishment Islam remained the controlling discourse in the Muslim Middle East until about the beginning of the nineteenth century” (Ahmed 1992: 240).

#### **4.4 Gender Relations and Modern Currents in Contemporary Iraq**

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century was particularly important for Iraq when it comes to gender relations, mainly due to the exposure of the country to modern forces and ideologies. In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, gender power relations were utterly imbalanced, as women in Iraq, especially women in rural/tribal areas, where the majority of Iraqi women lived during the newly established monarchy (1921-1958), were subject to a variety of discriminatory customs that in many cases were degrading, humiliating and lowered their status to a tribal possession managed by men. For example, tribal customs deprived women of the right to inherit land properties. They also allowed the use of women as compensation in tribal feuds. Women were forced to marry for the settlement of tribal feuds, especially blood feuds, where a woman was handed over as compensation to the victim’s family or tribe. Efrati (2012), reports that in 1929 the settlement of sixty-two tribal cases resulted in the handing over of 125 women from one tribe to another in the al-Amara region only. In addition to that, the prevalence of honour killings in rural areas, to wash away the dishonour brought about by a female relative as a result of having sex with a non-husband man, even if it was without their consent in the form of rape, shows how strictly women’s sexuality was regulated and monitored by men. Patriarchal tribal customs also determined that women had to either marry their paternal cousins or receive their permission to marry another man, and if they were to ignore this rule, the cousin had the right to kill either the woman or the man who

married her. The plight of women in Iraq, mainly a result of their subordination to men and a diminished self-determination, especially in rural/tribal areas, was not limited to the reinforcement of these discriminatory tribal customs; poverty and destitution had also left an ugly scar on the face of women's lives. Although poverty's negative effect was not limited to women, women suffered the most, due to their child bearing and rearing role in the family. The lack of midwives in rural areas, in particular, had a stark impact on women and children's welfare. In some areas, a third of children would die at birth. In these harsh conditions women were working hard, not only in child bearing and rearing or household activities, but also on farms and in cultivation and growing livestock; despite this, the patriarchal rules meant that they did not have any say over their own lives. Rural women were clearly seen as assets by their fathers and husbands to the extent that polygyny was considered by some a way of increasing the labour force. Rural women knew that objection to this servitude had dire consequences for them. Divorce could turn them into an outcast, as their family and relatives might abandon them. This would have had serious implications for them, such as dying out of hunger or even being murdered to wash away their 'stain' on family and tribe. In this difficult situation women were not given a chance to be educated. The illiteracy rate in Iraq was high amongst all sectors of society, but women suffered the most. Illiteracy was extremely high amongst women and especially rural women. In 1957 the literacy rate among rural women was only 1%; urban women's situation was considerably better as 21% of them were literate (Efrati 2012). Gender relations in Iraq in the early twentieth century are summarised by al-Ani (1972) as follows:

- Popular antipathy toward the education or employment of women
- General acceptance of the inferiority of women and their subordination to men
- Lack of women's rights in matters of marriage and divorce (a male prerogative)

- Cultural acceptance that the killing of women was legal under codes of honour killing- a practice based on pre-Islamic tribal customs
- General acceptance of the practice of polygamy as a man's right
- Women's segregation from men in both the private and public domain. The congregation of women was assigned to separate quarters, *haramlic*; and a male-dominated social order imposed on women a dress code which demanded the veiling of the face and shrouding of the body (Cited in Ismael and Ismael 2007: 248; *Italic in original*).

Modern ideas around gender equality were introduced and intellectual debate on women's status in society began in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Iraq. Reforms of the recent Ottoman years in Iraq included gender relations as well, when calls for women's presence in the public sphere, and especially the education sector, were heard and a debate on women's status within society began. It is widely accepted that the first people who advocated gender equality were male intellectuals, particularly two poets, Jamil Sidqi al-Zahawi (1863-1939) and Ma'ruf al-Rasafi (1875-1945). They put gender equality into the broader picture of the modernisation of the nation, emphasising that the nation would not develop if half of its population, namely the women, remained illiterate and deprived from participation in public life (Efrati 2004). The early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was a vital time in the history of Iraq and other countries in the region. Many ideas were in the making. The idea of nation and national development was at the centre of this remaking. Advocates of modernisation argued that women are key to national development. Women and their roles were reproduced through the introduction of new ideas. By publishing their poetry and newspaper articles opposing patriarchal customs and norms, such as veiling and the seclusion of women, polygyny, forced marriage and child marriage, and by emphasising the importance of women's education and marriage

through love, they created a fury in Iraq. In 1922, and during the very early years of the Iraqi monarchy, Al-Rusafi published a poem in a newspaper, criticising the treatment of women in the country. As a reaction to this poem some clerics in Iraq issued a fatwa against him, mainly because his approach was seen as against the traditional cultural values of the society, particularly the Islamic ones, which did not welcome women's participation in public life and supported sex segregation and traditional gender relations based on traditional patriarchal marriage. The press gave a platform to women to articulate their views in a world where other platforms were exclusively male dominated. The first Iraqi women's magazine, Layla, was published in October 1923. However, it was only in the 1930s and 1940s that a vibrant women's press evolved (Efrati 2004). In the same year that Layla was published, the first Iraqi women's organisation, Women's Awakening Club (*Nadi al-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya*) was born. This club was found by women from influential families such as Na'lima, the wife of Nuri al-Sa'id<sup>22</sup>, the then Minister of Defence. The club was meant to "foster self improvement and awareness in women and girls in preparation to better perform the duties 'expected by the nation'" (Efrati 2004: 159). As the country started to digest modern notions about nation and state, women's 'improvement' became an integral part of the progression of the nation. This opened doors for women to fight the gendered power relations that denied them their agency, but at the same time it presented new forms of restraints for them. The Women's Awakening Club opened literacy classes for women, and provided education for orphan girls. King Faysal also expressed support of the club. Members of the club were mainly from the middle and upper-middle classes, and their approach to social inequality was one of the uncritical viewpoints (Efrati 2004), mainly due to the fact that they were close to the ruling elite. This prevented them from criticising the government's policies that consolidated discriminatory patriarchal systems, such as the endorsement of Tribal Criminal

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<sup>22</sup> Nuri al-Sa'id was one of the most prominent politicians of the Monarchy era.

and Civil Disputes Regulation (TCCDR). This move legitimised tribal patriarchal customs and norms and had a devastating impact on rural women, as it stripped them of any state protection and put them under the tribesmen's full control.

Many women's organisations (especially charitable organisations) in the 1930s were established with the goal of promoting women's public participation through education and professional training, and improving women's and children's health and welfare. These organisations experienced considerable growth during the 1940s, especially after the end of the Second World War. Although by promoting women's participation in public life, women's organisations defied gender relations based on sex segregations, they lacked a clear political and feminist dimension. By the 1940s and especially the 1950s, some of these organisations started to pursue political objectives. For instance, during the Second World War a women's organisation called the [Women's] League Against Nazism and Fascism (*Jam'iyyat Mukafahat al-Naziyya wa-l-Fashiyya*) dedicated its activities to combating Nazism and Fascism.

In 1945 the Iraqi Women's Union, with a more distinct feminist trait, was founded. This was an umbrella organisation under which many other existing women's organisations came together. Although a large proportion of its activities were still aimed at fighting female poverty, illiteracy, and women's and children's healthcare and welfare, it started to go beyond this scope by demanding the reform of laws such as the criminalisation of prostitution. It also started to touch upon core issues regarding gender relations, such as submitting a request to parliament to discuss issues around divorce, and requesting a law that would restrict divorce as much as possible and amend child custody law in the event of divorce, so that children's custody would be granted to the most competent parent rather than fathers, regardless of their status. The Union also worked to improve working women's conditions and strived to protect women's property rights. These demands were against the

traditional gender relations in Iraq, organised by clerics and tribal leaders. During the 1950s, the Iraqi Women's Union was the leading force campaigning for women's political rights and gender equality. It is worth noting that during these years, the women who participated in activities mainly came from educated, urban, middle and upper middle class, and were often related to politicians or influential officials. This reality, along with the fact that women's organisations like any other organisations needed to be licensed by the government, limited the scope of these organisation's activities and geared them towards a more conservative, uncritical agenda (Efrati 2004). Even so, many of the demands made by these organisations challenged the traditional patriarchal structures of Iraqi society. Women's public participation in the form of education and employment defied the conservative notions of sex-segregation and the God-designated role of women serving their husbands and children. The prospect of financial independence also challenged the traditional concept of women's dependency on men as members of the family that are supposed to observe obedience. It is important to note that the scope of women's organisations' activities was limited for a variety of reasons. As mentioned previously, during the first decades after the establishment of modern day Iraq, most people lived in rural areas where many of these modern ideas about gender equality could not easily reach the population. Illiteracy constituted the main obstacle. Al-Ali reports that "[t]he majority of the population clearly had no access to any form of education" (2007: 63).

Some women's activists, across the political spectrum, but particularly leftists, had more critical voices and participated in demonstrations and strikes and sit-ins against the establishment. Nationalist strands amongst women's rights activists were evident too. Since the days of monarchy, many Iraqis viewed nationalism as an ideology that had the potential to better Iraq's conditions and to liberate Iraq from foreign influence, which was seen as the main source of its plights. Some women's activists adopted this political rhetoric as their

discourse. However, these groups amongst women's rights activists faced many obstacles, particularly from the government. Some women's organisations and women's magazines and newspapers failed to obtain the licence necessary to operate; in other cases, licensed press were shut down due to their critical approach (Efrati 2004). Similar trends were happening in other countries in the region. While education, unveiling and the political participation of women were advocated in the region, women's roles as mothers, wives and citizens were debated as well. Abu-Lughod argues that "to be a wife and mother as these modernizers conceived of it was to be a very different kind of subject from the wife and mother of before" (1998: 8). The confusing trend in the first half of the 20th Century was the emphasis on women's public participation, while at the same time the intensification of their domestic roles. Women, as the citizens who had the responsibility for rearing the future generation, were dragged into nationalist projects. Now it was expected from women to fulfil their domestic duties, as mothers and wives serving their husbands and children, and consequently the nation. At the same time, they were expected to participate in public life, and take on a job for the sake of modernising the nation. These new duties, roles and expectations, and the opportunities provided to women, started to undermine patriarchal concepts, and subjected them to new forms of control and discipline, many of them self-imposed, such as producing their unveiled body as disciplined and chaste. Interestingly, traditional patriarchal values such as sex-segregation and veiling were challenged, but the expectations of sexual decency stayed largely intact. In other words, the 'modern' Iraqis did not consider veiling as a necessary custom to keep women 'decent' and prevent them from falling into sexual obscenity. This led to a change in gender norms in specific communities in Iraq. What has remained largely untouched is women's right to sexual agency. Therefore, women were still expected to be 'decent' and chaste, but not necessarily through adhering to customs and notions such as veiling and sex-segregation. That is why they were expected

to conduct themselves in a ‘disciplined’ manner while participating in public life, in a way that was not expected of men. This sexual double-standard and women’s sexual agency was hardly discussed in the public domain.

Depending on their agenda, successive ‘secular’ regimes in Iraq showed interest in the improvement of women’s status; yet they never approached female sexual agency, as this was considered a matter of the family. Their main concern was that in doing so they would lose a lot of support, particularly among men and influential traditional institutions (Al-Ali 2007). It is interesting to note that ‘progressive’ movements in Iraq, such as communist groups also never touched on this issue, proving the sensitivity of it in Iraqi society. This issue is key to Iraqi patriarchy, as will be explained later.

In 1958 the TCCDR was abolished (Abdullah 2003), in a move that was a blow to traditional patriarchal structures. This was followed by the introduction of the Family Status Law of 1959, which is to this day considered a progressive law in the region. This law is mainly seen as the result of Prime Minister Abd al-Karim Qasim’s aspiration to improve women’s status in society, combined with women’s rights activists participating in the legislative process. Naziha al-Dulaymi, the then Minister of Municipalities, who was the first female minister in the Arab world and the head of an active women’s rights group, the League for the Defence of Women’s Rights, was a member of the committee responsible for drafting the law (Efrati 2005). The law was meant to put an end to various traditional Islamic courts that used to handle family cases differently and according to religion, and essentially eliminated different treatment of Sunnis and Shias in family courts. The law restricted polygyny and protected women against arbitrary divorce. It set the legal age of marriage at 18. Equally important was the inheritance privilege. The law gave an equal share of inheritance to men and women (Marr 2012). Many religious leaders considered these legal codes as being against the Sharia.



On the other hand, investments in education, in addition to the encouragement of women participating in public life resulted in a substantial increase in the number of schools for girls. The number of elementary schools for girls in 1957, one year before Qasim took over, was 274, accommodating 108,603 pupils. In 1963, the last year of Qasim's regime, the number of these schools increased to 542- almost doubling in six years, and educating 244,709 female pupils (Al-Kassir 1965).

The Ba'ath Party, which took over after a Coup d'état in 1963, introduced itself as a progressive socialist party. However, its first actions in power proved to be more conservative, mainly because conservative military figures gained the upper hand within the party and in the government. One of the first legal changes that happened during this time was to amend the 1959 Family Status Law. This move took place due to pressures from both Sunni and Shia clerics, and modified the clause that gave equal rights to inheritance (Marr 2012). Despite the conservative trait of the political elite, urban women in the 1960s witnessed the same trend that had started during the last years of the monarchy, and especially under Qasim. During this period, educated, urban women were participating in the vibrant political atmosphere of the country. An example is the Iraqi Women's League, which was an associate of the Iraqi Communist Party (Al-Ali 2007). The Ba'ath regime continued to encourage women's participation in the public sphere, especially the education system. On a social level, the dissemination of modern ideologies by secular parties, such as the Communist party, helped women to gain more control over their lifestyles; for example, some women in larger cities, particularly in the capital Baghdad felt free to choose non-traditional dress codes.

Women in the capital wore more daring and fashionable clothes than women in the rest of the country, especially the countryside, where women continued to wear more

conservative dress. In the 1960s, it was not unusual for younger women in Baghdad to wear miniskirts as it was the fashion at the time in Western countries (Al-Ali 2007: 98).

Decades after the establishment of modern day Iraq, the state managed to consolidate its power. State institutions were now responsible for dealing with matters of the family, and appeared to be promoting gender equality, although in limited areas. The influence of traditional institutions was eclipsed by the growing power of the state, resulting in the transformation of social systems, including traditional patriarchal structures. Nevertheless, this was not the end of patriarchy in Iraq. The extremely centralised political Ba'ath regime tried hard to shift the power balance towards controlling women's lives, from male kin to the state, and turning the state to the main "patriarch and patron of the country" (Al-Ali 2007: 146). During the years of Ba'ath rule, particularly when Saddam was in power, the regime tried hard to weaken the patriarchal structure of the family and tribe by assuming their powers to the state. This strategy changed to some extent in the 1990s, when the regime was struggling to survive, as will be explained below. Replacing traditional patriarchy with state patriarchy was increasingly important, as the Iraqi regime was veering towards more centralisation and autocracy. Women's organisations and initiatives were used as propaganda tools, propagating the regime's rhetoric, which was increasingly centred around the 'strong leader' and his ingenious plans to modernise the nation and fight the enemies that wanted to harm the nation. In this way the regime used gender equality as a platform to indoctrinate women with a 'modern' rhetoric that was a combination of nationalism, militarism, praising the 'saviour' of the nation and gender equality. The state's patriarchal orientation was spelled out by Saddam Hussein at the party's 8th regional congress in January 1974:

Women will not be liberated by women's assertions... Women can only be liberated by liberation of the entire society, political and economic. Since the Arab Socialist Party is the leader of social change in every sphere and activity, the main and vanguard responsibility falls on its shoulders (Regional Command, Baath Party 1974: 116-117, cited in Ismael and Ismael 2000: 194-195).

During these years, more women were encouraged to participate in public life. This narrative was largely employed by the state to further its causes. This policy, which was viewed as a way of emancipating women, challenged the fundamental tenets of traditional patriarchy and resulted in more unveiling of women; an increase in the numbers of educated women, and the increasing presence of female workers in the job market. A manifestation of these developments was the fact that, "Iraqi women were among the most educated in the whole region" (Al-Ali, 2005: 743). Nonetheless, women in the countryside were almost completely deprived of the privileges that urban women, especially Baghdadi women, enjoyed. The majority of women from poor backgrounds, especially in rural areas, did not have access to education and proper healthcare. Moreover, their freedom and self-determination was extremely limited by the traditional patriarchal and religious structures of their communities.

In 1979 Saddam Hussein took power (Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett 2001). He is believed to have been the main figure in the Ba'ath Party years before he formally assumed the Presidency. Saddam was keen to promote a more secular attitude towards gender relations, particularly to reform the laws pertaining to the public sphere. This attitude was in line with replacing traditional patriarchy with state patriarchy by assuming powers to the state- powers that used to be in the hands of the patriarchal family. However, the regime fell short of dealing with male relatives' powers to control women's sexuality for fear of

alienating the population and losing support. Although secular attitudes towards gender relations since the days of the monarchy were always opposed by conservative sectors of society, particularly clerics and tribal leaders, the wider public was accepting of them, especially when the regime was able to deliver economic prosperity, and as long as it did not touch what was perceived as the private aspect of gender relations. Saddam's cautious approach towards modernising gender relations is clear from the following statement he made at the 7th Congress of the General Federation of Iraqi Women in 1976. In response to women's rights groups which were demanding radical reforms, he said: "But when the revolution tackles some legal matters related to women without taking a balance of attitudes to the question of equality and its historical perspective, it will certainly lose a large segment of the people" (Hussein 1981: 36-38, cited in Al-Ali 2007: 140).

In 1980, one year after Saddam's presidency began, the Iran-Iraq war started. The imperatives of the war and the prominence of internal security during this period caused the regime to change its rhetoric towards gender equality. The pictures of men and women working shoulder to shoulder to build a modern country were replaced by images of brave men going to war to protect their homeland, which was mainly portrayed as a female whose honour was in danger. The narrative of the regime started veering towards a more conservative patriarchal one. In a country where the regime was obsessed with controlling every aspect of life, this change of heart had real consequences for gender relations in the country.

The Ba'th's gendered recruitment policies during the war and their gendered war propaganda can be expected to have reinforced images of male heroism and superiority, notions of gender differences, ideas of virility and practices of male

bonding among the individuals affected by them and in Iraqi society in general (Rohde 2006 cited in Al-Ali 2007: 154).

Towards the end of the war (which ended in 1988) the regime completely distanced itself from reform and gender equality, especially to help boost men's diminishing morals during the years of the war of attrition. At the same time, there was another trend during the years of the war that further increased women's public participation. Iran's population was much higher than Iraq's and was able to more easily recruit soldiers to go to war. This impacted the balance of manpower during the war and led the Iraqi regime to push more and more men towards the war front, creating a vacuum in the job market. This void was filled by employing more and more women to do the jobs that men used to do, mainly in the public sector, but even in the private sector.

The events of the early 1990s, however, caused Saddam's regime to greatly shift its policy on gender and 'hand back' many patriarchal powers to the conservative sections of society. In August 1990 Iraq invaded its neighbour, Kuwait. As explained in the previous chapter, the international community led by the US, expelled Iraqi forces from Kuwait in 1991, and the UN Security Council placed Iraq under harsh economic sanctions. Saddam's regime was struggling for survival and therefore it chose to 'woo' the influential conservative sections of society by abandoning 'modernisation' projects. Interestingly, one of the areas that the regime was happy to surrender power over was gender (Baram 1997). As a result of "the regime's rehabilitation of tribal traditions" (Ismael and Ismael 2007: 257), the penal code was amended to satisfy the conservative sections of society. Amongst the laws that were introduced was exemption from punishment for perpetrators of honour crimes, and also the legalisation of wife beating. Although the law was abrogated two months later, the attempt to change the law in this manner highlights the regime's plans to

satisfy the conservative sections within society at the expense of gender equality.

The sanctions had a dire impact on the infrastructures that were already under pressure as a result of the eight years of war with Iran. The education system was hit particularly hard, with negative consequences for women. The country witnessed a sharp decline in the numbers of female students, as many families could not afford to send their children to school. Public attitude towards women's employment also changed. As the country suffered enormously under sanctions, and unemployment rates soared, women were pushed into household environments. Marriage, rather than education and financial independence, seemed the only way forward for many women. As a result, "nuclear patriarchy" ...increased women's dependency on one male provider, especially in the light of the fact that the state had withdrawn its previous support" (Husein, 2005: 196, cited in Al-Ali 2007: 199). During this period, the social environment changed towards more conservative and Islamic ideologies. Women's dress code is a clear sign of this transformation. Hijab and Islamic covering started to replace the Western dress code, even in the most liberal environments such as universities. The regime, which had previously boasted about its 'progressive policies' towards gender and its animosity towards 'reactionary ideologies', resorted to religious rhetoric. As a symbol of this transformation, one of the most important slogans in Islam, Allahu Akbar (God is Great), was added to the flag of the country, in Saddam's handwriting.

Saddam Hussein opportunistically engaged in a national faith campaign (al-hamla al-wataniyya al-imaniyya), responding to a changing domestic social climate—a population increasingly drawn towards religion and social conservatism alongside an attempt to increase regional and international support among the Islamic umma (Al-Ali 2007: 200-201).

All in all, under the UN sanctions, Iraqi women lost many gains they had made during the past decades, mainly as a result of the state's decision to give up some of the patriarchal powers that it had managed to take away from religious and tribal institutions.

After years of reverting to traditional gender norms in Iraq, the post-Saddam era came with US policy to deliver gender equality. This included the involvement of women in the reconstruction efforts in Iraq, which were led by the US administration. Other US institutions such as Congress were also concerned with women's status in Iraq.

In May 2003, a bill "expressing the sense of Congress that the United States should provide assistance for women and women's organizations in Iraq in order to strengthen and stabilize the emerging Iraqi democracy" was introduced" ... In November 2003, a bill "commending Iraqi women for their participation in Iraqi government and civil society, encouraging the inclusion of Iraqi women in the political and economic life of Iraq, and advocating the protection of Iraqi women's human rights in the Iraqi Constitution" was introduced" (Armanios 2004: 14).

The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) declared gender equality as one of its goals in building a free and prosperous Iraq. During the eight years of occupation, and in its efforts to reconstruct Iraq, the U.S administration stressed its commitment to promote and support activities that would help women to take part in political, civil, and economic spheres in the new Iraq. To achieve this goal, it designated some of the funds allocated to the reconstruction of Iraq to activities pertaining to gender equality. For example, the CPA in conjunction with USAID funded several women's centres, some of which were opened by CPA's head, Paul Bremer, to train women in different fields, including business skills and legal advice. These

types of affirmative actions were a formal policy of the CPA (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009). However, the support for women's 'empowerment' policies was implemented without considering the local social and political contexts. Neoliberal ideas, such as the importance of private entrepreneurship in democracy, underpinned these plans, without any regard for the reality of a war-torn country that for decades had been run by a heavily centralised state economy. In some cases, these centres raised suspicions amongst local people, who started asking questions about the purpose of these centres, which their women were attending.

The post-Saddam era has not been a good time for improving gender equality in Iraq, as several developments during this period have helped consolidate the imbalanced power relations between the two sexes. Violence has been the biggest problem in post-Saddam Iraq, hindering progress on all social, political and economic levels. As mentioned above, the increasing participation of women in the public sphere under successive 'secular' regimes transformed gender relations in Iraq. The post-Saddam violence, however, has limited women's presence in public domain, helping to reverse the achievements in gender relations. This is despite the increasing presence of women in other public domains such as the growing media sector and the political sphere, as will be explained later. For example, the lack of security has left women in a more vulnerable position, since they are afraid of going out in many areas because of the increasing number of abductions. This is a particularly sensitive matter, as abduction in many cases can mean rape. In a society that is oversensitive towards women's sexual experiences, rape can bring shame and disrepute to the victim and her family. Also, the international organisations concerned with the improvement of women's status had to leave the country in 2004 and 2005 because of the deteriorating security situation. Some of the people working for these organisations were killed, forcing others to move to neighbouring countries such as Jordan, and resorting to 'remote management'. This has negatively affected the quality and the effectiveness of the services



they provide, many of which were aimed at preparing women to participate in socio-economic activities. In addition to the politically or criminally motivated violence, reports indicate a rise in domestic violence, including honour-based violence (Linos *et al.* 2012). The inability and/or unwillingness of state institutions to act against this type of violence is a sign of the rise in traditional patriarchal norms.

On the other hand, the proliferation of militia groups, most of them Islamic, had restrictive consequences for women's participation in socio-political and economic activities. These groups grew in a power vacuum to oppose the Coalition Forces. They have been increasingly growing in power and influence, even after foreign troops left the country in 2011. Islamic militias have been attempting to impose their version of religion on society, and gender relations is an area they are very interested in. They have tried hard to impose traditional gender norms such as hijab and sex segregation (Al-Ali and Pratt 2009). The Sunni militias, such as Al-Qaeda and IS, have been the strictest about these gender norms in the areas they control; but also Shia militias who are part of the state, have had a huge influence on women's presence in public spheres, as they propagate the gender relations that they see as being compatible with the religion of Islam, and the values, norms and customs of Iraqi society. In this regard, they are in line with the tribal forces that exploited the power vacuum and the adverse security situation to expand their influence in Iraqi society. They have enjoyed great influence since the early 1990s, but in post-2003 they have been able to consolidate their influence even more. In a largely tribal society such as Iraq, when the state institutions are unable to provide security for the citizens, it is only normal that they resort to traditional bonds to provide security for themselves. It is well known that people with larger and stronger tribes in Iraq enjoy more security than others. The growth of these conservative sections of society eroded many of the achievements that Iraqi women had been fighting for since the establishment of the state. This is not to say that gender equality was

achieved under Saddam. The repressive nature of the regime; the militarisation of society; the subsequent wars and sanctions that undermined the infrastructures of the country in every single aspect, from education to health; the rise of the power of conservative groups that were keen to follow their deeply patriarchal and anti-equality agendas, and many other factors, resulted in a retreat to traditional patriarchal norms under Saddam. But the hopes that came mainly as a result of the coalition forces' rhetoric about improving women's status has definitely been shattered, and this happened soon after the war in 2003. The reality is that more than a decade after the toppling of Saddam Hussein by Allied Forces, women's status in Iraq has declined in many areas (Green and Ward 2009).

However, beside these negative developments, there have also been some important positive developments in regard to gender equality. The most obvious development is women's quotas in the Iraqi parliament, the Kurdistan region parliament and in the provincial councils around the country. A minimum of 25% of member places in parliaments and provincial councils are guaranteed to be women; the figure for Kurdistan's parliament is 30%. Even so, as Al-Ali and Pratt (2009) explain, many of these female members of parliament and provincial councils are members of Islamic parties and are not necessarily very keen on gender equality; in fact, in some cases they have fought to reverse the achievements made in this area. Yet no one cannot ignore the fact that women's presence in higher levels of decision making at an unprecedented level, is a positive signal for people concerned with gender equality in Iraq. Some of the most active and influential members of parliament in Iraq are female, and the pictures of outspoken female politicians (both Islamic and secular) in Iraq has become a normal occurrence. In other areas of decision making, women are making progress too. For example, Thikra Alwash who took office in 2015 is the first female mayor of Baghdad.

#### 4.5 *Ird, Ghira and Áar*

Despite all the developments since the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, which resulted in fundamental changes in gender norms in Iraq, gender inequality remains an issue. The ideas promoted and encouraged by the country's Islamic heritage are still persuasive, as certain cultural values are promoted by influential traditional authorities, such as clerics who infer their Islamic rules from this heritage. Traditional tribal values, which are to a great extent in line with this Islamic heritage, also play an important role in shaping current gender relations in Iraq. They informed Islamic values at the time of the advent of Islam and were subsequently influenced by Islamic heritage themselves.

One of the most important of these tribal cultural values, which is key to understanding the current gender culture in Iraq, is *ird*. Although *ird* is not mentioned in the Quran, observing it is in line with the gender relations that are considered legitimate in Islam and promoted through the Quran, *Sunnah*<sup>23</sup> and Islamic Jurisprudence. Indeed, the Islamic heritage encourages the spread and consolidation of the concept of *ird* (Dodd 1973), as will be seen later. *Ird* and the highly patriarchal set of values and customs developed around it are enshrined in the traditional culture of the society. In Iraq, patriarchy is centred on controlling women's sexuality through observation and enforcement of codes of practice that have been developed around *ird*. This makes sexuality the main site of patriarchy in Iraq.

*Ird* promotes a sexual double standard that obliges females to avoid a wide range of sexual behaviours that are allowed for men, including those that can be seen as sexuality inviting to a 'strange' man. In this manner, a simple act such as a smile or speaking loudly in public might be seen as a 'dishonourable demeanour'. *Ird* is mainly a type of masculine

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<sup>23</sup> Teachings and practices of Prophet Muhammad and his disciples that are one of the main sources of Islamic Jurisprudence.

honour and females are considered equal to it, therefore it is very common in Iraq and other societies that value *ird*, to say that female members of a male's kin are his *ird*. Thus, a male's female kin and *ird* can be used interchangeably (Almaney 1981; Abu-Rabia 2011). *Ird* assigns men as women's guardians. This is in line with Islam, as the Quran calls men the maintainers of women, as will be shown later.

Men are expected to protect their *ird* (i.e. women) from any encroachment by 'strange men' and also to prevent women from engaging in any 'inappropriate sexual behaviour' to make sure that their women stay chaste to prevent bringing *áar* (dishonour) to the man and their family. If they fail to do so, men lose their social status and are ashamed because "[m]isbehavior by a woman detracts from her male figure's 'ird [honour]" (Abu-Rabia 2011: 34). In order to avoid the violation of *ird* and the prospect of bringing *áar* to them, men are supposed to act according to their *ghira*, which is one of the most significant concepts that have developed to support *ird*. *Ghira* is a virile moral courage that obliges men to protect some important and holy values and moral codes. For instance, a man with *ghira* takes care of and protects his family members, especially the 'vulnerable', such as children, the elderly and women, but also his homeland and religion. So someone who has *ghira* is courageous and always ready to defend his family, religious beliefs or country, amongst other things, through taking different action, including violence. One of the most important values that a person with *ghira* has to defend is his *ird*. A man with *ghira* might take pre-emptive actions in order to keep his *ird* intact, for example by circumscribing his female kin's movements to make sure that they are not exposed to 'indecent' sexual behaviours. In more extreme cases women are deprived from any sexual pleasure so that they remain 'restrained', hence the proliferation of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)<sup>24</sup> (UNICEF 2011) in some areas of Iraq. However, a 'decent woman' is expected to preserve and protect the *ird* of the family herself

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<sup>24</sup> This practise is more widespread in Iraqi Kurdistan and almost non-existence in the Arabic parts of Iraq.

by avoiding any sexual contact outside marriage; in this regard it is mainly the responsibility of mothers to bring up ‘modest’ and ‘chaste’ daughters.

*Ird* can be violated to different degrees and men with *ghira* are expected to react accordingly. Not wearing modest clothing can violate *ird*, and in this case men might be expected to pressurise or even force their female kin to comply with *ird* codes and wear ‘proper clothing’. The definition of appropriate behaviour, however, can differ from family to family and from community to community. For example, for some communities, not observing Islamic hijab might be considered a violation of *ird*, but in some other communities it might not be. But when *ird* is violated, according to the delineation of the family or community, men need to take action. The ultimate level of the violation of *ird* is penetration by a non-husband man, especially one that leads to pregnancy. This will bring *áar* to the family, and male members’ *ird* is affronted, therefore they are shamed and lose their status and respect in their society. In this case the family, and especially men, are supposed to take action to amend the situation and regain their reputation. This happens by making several different moves that vary widely, from verbal reproach to death. “Elopement, marriage, hushing-up of violations, compensation and banishment, or any combination thereof are the usual and preferred solutions for cases of honor” (Abou-Zeid 1965: 685, cited in Dodd 1973: 43). However, there are cases where the penalty for the violation of *ird* is much harsher. This is when a man (or a group of men who are the relatives of the woman who violated *ird*) decides to ‘wash away’ the *áar*, which is brought to them by one of their female kin so that they regain their honour and consequently social status. In this case she might be murdered, in an act of honour crime. “The penalties for violation of the norms surrounding *Ird* are severe and may include death. These are the penalties inflicted by men on women of their own family” (Dodd 1973: 45). As explained above, violence is an important site of patriarchy that helps men to subordinate women; in this case to make them

abide by the *ird* related values and norms that are designed to restrict women's sexuality, which is another very important site of patriarchy.

The severity of the penalty may have a strong connection with whether or not the public is aware of the act. Families may try to keep these violations a secret, so that their honour remains intact; if successful, the penalties are normally less severe because "Ird is a matter of reputation even more than of fact. What other people think becomes as important as what takes place" (Dodd 1973: 45).

*Ird* is not necessarily an individual attribute. A group, such as a tribe or religious sect, may have a shared *ird*. This cultural value is a universal notion in Iraq (and indeed many other countries in the region) (Khayyat 1990). "68% of young Iraqi men believe that killing a girl for dishonouring the family is justifiable" (Human Rights Council 2014: 3). The agnates and husbands are primarily responsible for preserving the *ird* of the family. The significance of this concept in gender relations in Iraq varies between different communities and among different families, but it is fair to say that it is present in all communities. In communities where tribal ties are stronger, codes around *ird* are observed more strictly and diligently. The concept's extension is also wider in families that belong to these communities, so it could go beyond sisters and wives and be extended to female cousins and other relatives too. In communities with less tribal ties, these cultural values are less strictly observed, giving female members of these families a greater chance of self-determination. In these families, *ird* covers only sisters, wives and in some cases mothers, especially if the mother is/or looks young. Additionally, the severity of the punishment meted out on the females who violate codes related to *ird* is much less severe and can be as lenient as "being lectured on morals" (Khayyat 1990: 23), especially if the violation of *ird* that has happened is not in the form of sexual intercourse but less advanced relationships.

Although the concept *ghira* can be attributed to women as well, it is predominantly a masculine one. The masculinity connected to the concept *ghira* is ‘constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities’ (Connell 1991: 183); therefore, a man who does not conform to the codes around *ghira* and is not ready to defend his *ird*, for example by showing indifference towards his female kin’s sexual conduct, is mocked, humiliated, shamed, and in more extreme cases, ostracised. A man who does not have *ghira* is viewed as lacking morality. In order to have status in society, a man needs to have *ghira* and be prepared to defend his *ird*. The masculinity embedded in the gender system of *ird* and *ghira* is a hegemonic one, and it subordinates and delegitimises other masculinities by claiming honour and morality to itself only and dispossessing these values from other types of masculinity.

#### **4.6 *Ird, Ghira* and *Áar*: Hegemonic Masculinity**

Hegemonic masculinity is the pattern of practice that facilitates the continuation of men’s dominance over women. It is distinguished from other types of masculinities in that it embodies “the currently most honored way of being a man” and requires “all other men to position themselves in relation to it” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832). In this manner it discredits other types of masculinities through a variety of mechanisms spanning from mockery to violence.

Hegemonic masculinity is not considered to be normal, but it presents some patterns of practice as a collective ideal. Actually, the exemplars of hegemonic masculine men are normally only a minority, and there is a distance between this collective ideal and most men’s actual lives, but the concept is certainly normative. However, most men benefit from the patriarchy sustained by patterns of action enforced by hegemonic masculinity, without necessarily conforming to the characteristic of its exemplars. These men show a complicit masculinity. In fact, the power of hegemonic masculinity lies in complicity from these men

who do not necessarily enact the strongest version of hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, in order for hegemonic masculinity to be sustained, it requires compliance from women too. These are usually women who are persuaded that hegemonically masculine patterns of practice are the norms and benefit them. Therefore, enacting hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily require violence, although it could be supported by it; it mainly consolidates men's ascendancy over women "through culture, institutions, and persuasion" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832).

The gender system of *ird* is a hegemonic masculine pattern of practice that consolidates and sustains patriarchy in Iraqi society. This system has great implications for women as well as men in Iraqi society. Sex segregation; emphasis on hijab and 'modest clothing' that extremely limits women's choices in what they can wear; preventing from or limiting women's access to education or paid-work in mixed-sex environments; preventing women looking for a sexual partner and choosing one that they see fit, are amongst these implications. In fact, in order to observe *ird* in a society "the actions of women must be strictly circumscribed" (Dodd 1973: 46). Through observing *ird* and *ghira*, almost all aspects of women's lives can be determined by male family members or relatives and, consequently, the notion of self-determination diminishes. It is important to note that the collective ideal is to make sure women do not have 'inappropriate sexual contact or even thoughts' and to regain *ird* in the case of violation. To what extent men are willing or able to enforce codes around *ird* and to conform to the 'ideal' man with *ghira* determines how much control they have over their female kin's lives. And this varies from person to person and community to community in societies that value *ird*. This explains why in some of these societies women can have a great deal of freedom of movement and can excel in many roles in society.

Despite the fact that the developments of the last century have changed women's status in Iraq and that, nowadays, many Iraqi women are participating in public activities, the



traditional cultural values of *ird* and *ghira* still allow men to dominate women and greatly shape their lives in accordance with their own benefits. It is worth noting that this male dominance and control is sustained without necessarily using force. This “social ascendancy [is] achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contents of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes” (Connell 1991: 184). Linking women’s sexual conduct to men’s pride, honour, morality, reputation and masculinity has made it very difficult for women to avoid this system, and it has allowed men to limit women’s activities in almost all aspects of their lives. Equally, the support that other sites of patriarchy such as culture, violence and the state give to *ird*, creates a very efficient system that is difficult to avoid. Culture, represented by religious and tribal values and norms, is particularly important, because it persuades women to abide by the rules of *ird* voluntarily.

Accordingly, women have to depend on men’s judgment and decisions to take any step in life, even in the most basic and private matters. For example, men can decide when a woman (in many cases children) is ready for marriage and who can be the future husband, or if they can study or work outside their home. Even when women are allowed to study or work, in many cases women feel the threat of losing this privilege any minute if men come to the conclusion that this is against their *ird* (for example if a woman tries to establish a relationship with a man). As a result, women must be very vigilant and try to keep men happy by obeying them, so that they can enjoy some of their rights.<sup>25</sup>

Equally, the system of *ird* makes it difficult for men who otherwise might not be particularly interested in dominating their own female kin members, to ignore codes connected to these concepts. They will be insulted and mocked and degraded. A whole system of swearwords has been developed around these concepts. In order to insult someone,

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<sup>25</sup> This is not to say that women in Iraq are passive and that they never resist patriarchy, and that they are completely under men’s control. It is rather to emphasise that the exemplars of this type of hegemonic masculinity are men with *ghira* who are in full control of their own female kin’s lives. In fact, it is very possible that many men cannot or are not willing to fully live up to these exemplars.

people use sexual words towards their female kin members. These words can hurt men in Iraq and in many cases can be the start of physical violence. In fact, the ultimate insult is when someone is labelled as lacking *ghira*. This might even result in tribal disputes that need to be resolved through *fasel* and *sulh* in a tribal court (Carroll 2011). The concepts of *ird* and *ghira* are powerful and hegemonic and make men, especially those from families with stronger tribal ties, feel huge pressures to observe codes connected to them in order to gain status in their society and retain their honour and dignity. Shame, reputation, dignity, honour and morality are used in this system as notions that help “in preventing alternative [masculinities] gaining cultural definition and recognition as alternative” (Connell 1991: 186).

On the other hand, patterns of action related to the hegemonic masculine system of *ird* are presented as positive and beneficial for women to persuade them to conform to them. In fact, “most accounts of hegemonic masculinity do include such “positive” actions as bringing home a wage, sustaining a sexual relationship, and being a father” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 840-41). Men and women in general consider *ghira* to be a positive attribute in Iraq. As explained above, a man with *ghira* is very keen to look after and protect the ‘vulnerable’ members of his family, mainly women and children, and to provide for them. This ‘positive’ aspect of hegemonic masculine actions plays a role in persuading women that it is in their own interests to conform to the codes around this system, especially when draws on revered cultural values such as religious values. In fact, hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily mean being horrible towards women. On the contrary, women might feel more comfortable and familiar and safe with this type of masculinity.

...it is difficult to see how the concept of hegemony would be relevant if the only characteristics of the dominant group were violence, aggression, and self-

centeredness. Such characteristics may mean domination but hardly would constitute hegemony—an idea that embeds certain notions of consent and participation by the subaltern groups (ibid).

This pattern of practice can be more persuading when there is “a kind of fit between hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity” (Connell 1991: 185). In this system a ‘real’ man is defined as a man who is zealous about his female kin, that has *ghira* and is prepared to defend his *ird*. This is considered a characteristic of a courageous man who protects women from the bad intentions of strange men who try to encroach on their chastity and reputation, and therefore is ideal for them. This masculine gesture is played against the emphasised feminine characteristics of being modest, soft, vulnerable, intellectually inferior and needing protection from a ‘real’ man to feel safe.

Out of this opposition of male and female sexual roles emerges an extreme duality in the conception of male and female character and in the positive and negative aspects of feminine character as well. Men are assertive, strong, rational, capable of self-control, especially sexual control; women are vulnerable, weak, emotional, uncontrolled, and unreliable, especially sexually (Dickemann 1981: 419).

By accepting the argument that is based on the claim that women are inferior and in need of the superior men’s protection, women are complicit in the hegemonic masculine system of *ird*. It is, however, important to bear in mind that although *ird* does draw upon emphasised femininity as a persuasion mechanism to sustain patriarchy, it also draws on other very important notions to make it even more persuasive for women to accept the dominance of men and be complicit in this. As explained above, Iraqi patriarchy draws upon traditional

cultural values (e.g. religious, tribal) that constitute the value system of Iraqi people. These values are the pillars of Iraqi people's identity, making it more difficult for women to oppose or resist them, because that will mean opposing the very value system that they dearly respect.

#### **4.7 Religion**

As explained previously, culture is an important site of patriarchy. In Iraq, tribal as well as religious texts work hand in hand with sexuality to promote and sustain patriarchy. This explains why *ird* and its relevant codes and practises are so pervasive and convincing for both men and women in Iraq, as these concepts are intertwined with religious ideologies in a sophisticated manner. Religion, as an important source of morality in Iraq, obliges people (both males and females) to conform to some aspects of *ird*. The role of religion in promoting *ird* is a vital one, because, as explained in Chapter Two, traditional institutions in Iraq are widely respected and religious leaders are highly influential. Although the term *ird* is not mentioned in the Quran, some of the values revolving around it have been encouraged and incited in the Quran, *Sunnah* and Islamic Jurisprudence. The Quranic verse 34 of the *Surah* (chapter 4) *Al-Nisa* (Women) reads

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient (to Allah and to their husbands), and guard in the husband's absence what Allah orders them to guard (e.g. their chastity, their husband's property, etc.). As to those women on whose part you see illconduct [sic], admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly, if it is useful), but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means

(of annoyance). Surely, Allah is Ever Most High, Most Great (The Qur'anic Arabic Corpus, verse 4:34).

According to this Qur'anic verse, men are supposed to protect women ('protectors and maintainers'; in other translations the same term has been translated to 'managers of the affairs of women' or 'in charge of women'). On the other hand, women are expected to be obedient and chaste. If they disobey their husbands or violate their chastity, they must be punished, including by physical punishment.

This Qur'anic notion, which is part of Iraqi Muslims' moral belief system, is in accordance with the hegemonic masculine system of *ird*. Additionally, in this verse there "is an overt recognition of the relation between masculine control over female sexuality and male investment of effort in offspring" (Dickemann 1981: 420). Men 'spend from their means' and in return expect women's obedience and sexual control.

Islamic Jurisprudence plays an important role in the daily lives of Iraqi people. Muslim clerics' religious publications and sermons are full of rules for women who are advised to be modest and obey their guardians (mainly, fathers and husbands and in the event of the absence of them, for example as a result of death, paternal grandfathers, brothers and uncles. See Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani's website). For example, according to most Shia clerics, women need their husband's permission to go out. Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, instructs people on his website about this rule: "For a woman with whom permanent marriage is contracted, it is haram [unlawful] to go out of the house without the permission of her husband" (Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, Marriage, Rules regarding permanent marriage, Rule: 2421). This obligatory rule is consistent with the traditional cultural values of *ird* and *ghira*. Another value that is promoted both by *ird* and Islam is the concept of modesty for women. The concept *ird*, as well as the religion of Islam, encourages and enforces female dress codes in

a stricter fashion than male dress code. The Qur'anic verse 31 of the *Surah An Nur* (Chapter 24) set out in detail the legitimate dress code for women:

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye Believers! turn ye all together towards Allah, that ye may attain Bliss (The Quranic Arabic Corpus, verse 24:31<sup>26</sup>).

This code is also reflected in Islamic Jurisprudence:

Woman should conceal her body and hair from a man who is non-Mahram<sup>27</sup>, and as an obligatory precaution, she should conceal herself even from a Na-baligh<sup>28</sup> boy who is able to discern between good and evil, and could probably be sexually excited. But she can leave her face and hands upto (sic) wrists uncovered in the presence of Na-Mahram, as long as it does not lead him to casting a sinful, evil glance or her to doing

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<sup>26</sup> There is no consensus among Muslim clerics as to how much of women's bodies should be covered. For example, some believe that this includes the woman's face too and some rule out covering the face. However, almost all agree that women need to dress and behave modestly.

<sup>27</sup> Mahram is an unmarriageable kin (such as father/mother, brother/sister, etc.) with whom sexual intercourse is considered incestuous. The rest of people are non-Mahram

<sup>28</sup> A person who has not yet reached puberty.

something forbidden; for in both these cases, she must cover them (Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, Marriage: Looking at non-Mahram, Rule: 2442).

Sex segregation is another code of practise related to *ird* that is encouraged by Islam as well:

It is haram for a man and a woman who are not Mahram, to be together at a private place where there is no one else, if it is feared to lead to immorality and scandal, even if it is a place where another person can easily arrive. But if there is no fear of any evil, there is no objection (Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, Marriage, Miscellaneous rules concerning marriage, Rule: 2454).

Women who believe in these Islamic moral values and act according to them are complicit in promoting and enforcing hegemonic musicality that works towards sustaining patriarchy in a sophisticated multi-pronged, multi-layer manner. Therefore, it is fair to say that the subordination of women by men through the hegemonic masculine ideas of *ird* is achieved by persuasion to a great extent rather than force. Nonetheless, this does not mean that using force is completely avoided.

#### **4.8 Violence and Religion**

Women, who do not obey the rules of the hegemonic masculine concept of *ird*, can be severely punished. These women might face a range of honour-based violence in verbal, economic and physical forms, including murder. Violence is an important site of patriarchy. The legitimacy of using *ird*-based violence comes from another basis of patriarchy, which is culture; this type of violence is in accordance with Islamic Jurisprudence. Although the interpretation of the verse from the Qur'anic *Surah* mentioned above varies among Muslim

scholars,<sup>29</sup> Ayatollah Sistani's rulings are clear on this matter. He instructs his followers that men are allowed to beat their wives if they disobey them, although they are not allowed to beat harshly and the beating should be used as the third step for disciplining the wife (in line with the above Qur'anic verse) and that it shouldn't be done in revenge (see آية الله علي السستاني، احكام النشوز والشفاق، مسئله ٣٥٣ [Ayatollah Ali Sistani: Rules of recalcitrance and discord, rule 353]). Ayatollah Sistani is also clear that if a man does not fulfil his marital duties, his wife is not allowed to beat him.

In addition to that, according to Islamic Jurisprudence, a married women's punishment for adultery is death<sup>30</sup>. Although theoretically this applies to men as well, a sexual double standard promoted by Islam gives men more freedom to have various sexual partners. The Quran allows men to marry up to four wives at a time. Verse 3 of chapter 4 (Al-nisa) reads

And if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry (other) women of your choice, two or three, or four but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one or (the captives and the slaves) that your right hands possess. That is nearer to prevent you from doing injustice (The Qur'anic Arabic Corpus, verse 4:3).

Although there are debates amongst Islamic scholars as to whether this is an unambiguous rule that allows men to marry a maximum of four wives, orthodox Islamic Jurisprudence tends to take this Qur'anic verse literally and sanction polygyny.

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<sup>29</sup> There is a debate amongst Muslim scholars about the extent of the permissible violence and some have argued that the beating mentioned in this verse is symbolic, therefore men are not allowed to be violent towards their wives in any case.

<sup>30</sup> There is a debate amongst Islamic scholars as to whether it is possible at all to prove that someone has committed adultery.



In addition, Shia orthodox Jurisprudence allows men, including married men, to temporarily marry an unlimited number of women under certain circumstances for the purpose of sexual pleasure. These temporary marriages known as *mut'ah* (literally pleasure) “are contractual arrangements that legally unite [husband and wife] for a designated amount of time and for which the temporary wife is paid” (Ghodsí 1993: 645). *Mut'ah* is however not open for married women as all Shia *mujtahids* have ruled out *mut'ah* marriage for married women. Additionally, men can have as many temporary wives as they can afford, while women can only enter into one temporary marriage at a time and need to wait a certain period of time before remarrying (Ghodsí 1993), mainly for the purpose of paternity certainty (*Iddah*, The Oxford dictionary of Islam). Furthermore, virgin girls are not allowed to marry *mut'ah* without their guardian's (mainly father) permission (for more information about *mut'ah* see: Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani, Marriage, Marriage: Mut'ah (temporary marriage)).

These rules promoted by Islam delineate a sexual double standard that greatly restricts women's sexual conduct in a way that is aligned with *ird* and *ghira*.

#### **4.9 Legal System**

The state itself is also an important site of patriarchy in Iraq. Although for years successive Iraqi regimes have attempted to undermine Iraqi traditional patriarchy in order to consolidate state powers, various state institutions have also been supporting traditional patriarchy in Iraq. This is especially true for the post-Saddam era where the state is more influenced by the traditional forces of religion and tribe; in particular, the shows of empathy towards observing *ird* and its pertinent concepts, values and norms. The hegemonic masculine system of *ird*, through which ascendancy of men becomes possible, is not only promoted by tribal cultural values and religious doctrines, it is also backed by the Iraqi legal system. In fact, religious and tribal doctrines have, to some extent, shaped Iraqi state law. The Iraqi legal

system is obliged to respect Islamic principles. Also, the constitution emphasises the state's responsibility towards advancing the tribes.

According to the Iraqi penal code a man can physically punish his wife in order to discipline her. Again, two important sites for patriarchy- state and violence- working hand in hand to sustain men's domination over women. This violence allowed under state law is also consistent with the country's cultural norms, which is another site of patriarchy. "Paragraph 41 of the 1969 penal code considers a husband's punishment of his wife to be a legitimate private right... this is consistent with prevailing interpretations of Shari'a" (Ahmed 2010: 168). Moreover, the sexual double standard that greatly restricts women's sexual conduct in comparison to men is also enshrined into the legal system in Iraq. For instance, Iraqi law stipulates that polygyny is permissible under specific circumstances, while there is no mention of polyandry, as women are allowed to have only one husband at a time.

Polygamy is permitted under the law if a court finds that the husband can financially support more than one wife and treat them equally, but Ba'athist-era amendments allow men to evade even these restrictions if the new wife is a widow or if the husband initiates a divorce, marries, and then reconciles with his first wife (ibid).

Supportive of *ird* and *ghira* is also the punishment for honour killings in Iraqi penal code. Article 405 of the Iraqi Penal Code No 111 of 1969 (amended) stipulates that "Any person who wilfully kills another is punishable by life imprisonment or imprisonment for a term of years" (Iraq Federal Law 1969). Article 406 considers the death penalty for murder under certain circumstances. However, when it comes to *ird*-related crimes the law is much more lenient. In this regards article 409 stipulates:

Any person who surprises his wife in the act of adultery or finds his girlfriend in bed with her lover and kills them immediately or one of them or assaults one of them so that he or she dies or is left permanently disabled is punishable by a period of detention not exceeding 3 years (Iraq Federal Law 1969).

The state, as a site of patriarchy, is clearly supporting the system of *ird*. The implementation of this lenient punishment for *ird*-based killing sometimes proves difficult, mainly due to the complicity of the men who are in charge of enforcing the law in a society where most of the policemen and judges are men. The brutal murder of Do'a, a 17-year-old Yazidi girl, in 2005 is a vivid example of the complicity of men, including policemen, in enforcing the punishment codes connected to *ghira* and *ird*. Do'a was publicly stoned to death in broad daylight because she fell in love and fled from home with a man<sup>31</sup>. In the footage taken from this collective punishment, tens of people including police personnel either take part in the act of stoning or watch it (Mahmoud 2007). Although most of the men were bystanders and did not actively participate in the act of stoning, as the beneficiaries of *ird*, they allowed the murder to be committed. As explained in the previous section:

the number of men rigorously practising the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may be quite small. Yet the majority of men gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women (Connell 2014: 79).

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<sup>31</sup> Publicly killing, and especially stoning a woman that has violated *ird*, is very rare in Iraq. However, this case clearly highlights the complicity of men in enforcing codes related to *ird*.

As a result, family members who resort to *ird*-base violence, “often receive sympathy and tolerance from the police, if not encouragement for doing what they see as the right thing. Perpetrators are released without investigation or charges, and the government remains silent, treating the cases as private matters” (Ahmad 2010: 163). Another obstacle in the way of implementing the law is that these crimes largely go unreported and the death is attributed to accidents or militia violence (Ahmad 2010). This environment of complicity and support of *ird* makes it very difficult to implement the law that softly punishes the perpetrators of *ird*-base violence, not least because the people in charge can relate to *ird* and *ghira* and are benefiting from these values.

Patriarchy is deeply embedded in Iraqi culture. It is centred around sexuality and is sustained through sophisticated mechanisms that are promoted and enforced by old-established institutions, using a variety of notions and mechanisms to sustain men’s ascendancy over women; different sites of patriarchy work together to endure this domination. However, masculine domination is not self-producing and “is open to challenge and requires considerable effort to maintain” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 844). In modern societies, the patriarchal family has been challenged for a variety of reasons, including the transformation of women’s consciousness. This is a multi-dimensional process that has increasingly spread around the world, transforming traditional views on gender relations. The current trend indicates “a substantial decline of traditional forms of patriarchal family” (Castells 2010: 194) around the world but especially in developed countries. How about Iraq? Have the cultural values that underpin the Iraqi patriarchal family and encompass gender culture been altered? And what role does the media play in this regard?

#### 4.10 Conclusion

Iraqi gender culture draws heavily on cultural values that originated from Ancient Arabia. But the developments in the last century have also left their finger print on gender culture in this country. The introduction of ideas about gender equality, self-determination, unveiling and female participation in public sphere, amongst others, have transformed the gender culture in Iraq. Yet, the country is still deeply patriarchal. Iraqi patriarchy is deeply enshrined in the traditional institutions of tribe and religion that have greatly shaped the cultural sphere of the country. *Ird* and the concepts that have been developed around it allow men to limit women's sexual agency. This is a hegemonic masculine system that legitimises only one type of sexual attitude and discredits the rest. Men and women who do not follow the rules of this system lose their status in society. The rules stipulate that a man's reputation is related to their female kin sexual demeanour, while a woman's reputation is linked to their virtue. In this manner, women are denied sexual agency, as they are only permitted to have sexual relations that are considered legitimate under this system. By limiting women's sexual agency and linking it to men's reputation, women's lives are also limited in other areas, as many social activities are considered to put women in a situation in which *ird* is prone to be violated. Men, however, have more choice concerning their sexual relations, hence the existence of a sexual double-standard in Iraqi society. This does not, however, mean that men are not under pressure. They feel pressurised to defend their honour, through a variety of actions that include murdering their own female kin. Although this is the last resort, persuasion and the threat of violence are used as pre-emptive methods to avoid violent reparative actions. As in any other hegemonic masculine system, not all men are willing to do so, however, the majority are compliant with the rules as they benefit from the dividends provided by the system. Women also are compliant with *ird*-related rules and this facilitates the continuation of *ird*, because they believe that that the benefit from it. This makes

sexuality the main site of patriarchy in Iraq. Other systems, however, support sexuality as a patriarchal site, for example the cultural systems of religion and tribe legitimise *ird*-related actions. Violence in this regard is also legitimised. State institutions that draw on traditional values also support *ird* in a variety of ways, including refraining from punishing men who commit *ird*-related violent acts. This complicated system works in an efficient way to sustain men's dominance over women.

## **Chapter 5: Methodology**

### **5.1 Background**

This research explores the ways in which Iraqi citizens have sought to use media communications as part of their daily lives and, in particular, the ways in which the media has become embedded in practices that relate to gender relations. A key question here is to consider whether Iraqi citizens' access to media helps shape the ways in which they perceive gender relations. This question is especially important for women, whose lives are greatly shaped by patriarchal structures. The idea of this research came out of my curiosity about what is called the 'impact' of media on social relations. Since the abrupt introduction of satellite TV and the internet post 2003, Iraqis have been concerned about its 'impact' on their society. Media reports that warn about the negative impact of the media on social values, family bonds, and so on, have never stopped. Even today, one can find such reports supported by 'experts' opinions. Psychologists and sociologists, solicitors and judges, teachers and clerics, have voiced their concerns over this 'devastating impact'. Yet, the proliferation of the media in Iraq is intensifying by the day. People are rushing to buy the latest technology, and millions use it for a variety of reasons (Amos 2010: 11). One of the main areas that the question of the negative 'influence' of the media focuses on is gender relations. It is interesting that in a country where various terrorist groups have been using the media for more than a decade for propaganda and recruiting purposes, people in Iraq seem to be much more concerned about the 'influence' of the media on gender culture.

I was born in Iraq, but since the age of two, I lived in the neighbouring country of Iran. I am well aware of the Iranian regime's sensitivity towards the media. As a child, I remember how people hid their video players and VHS cassettes to avoid being caught by the authorities. Then satellite TV and the internet came along, only for the regime to start a

campaign of censorship and surveillance. The Iraqi regime was even stricter, but the 2003 war changed everything in Iraq. I was always curious to know what will happen when you have an open media environment in a country in which a strictly conservative value system dominates. I was raised in an environment in which the elite constantly warned against the horrible consequences of having an open media environment with regard to people's traditions and moral values. The education system, the state owned and run media, and the clergy through their access to a vast network of mosques, were all repeating the same claims. Sexuality and gender culture were also the main point of focus. The negative 'influence' on women was particularly highlighted.

Despite the public concern over the media's 'influence' in Iraq, academic circles have not paid much attention to this area. To help fill this gap, I embarked on this very important, but hugely under-investigated area of research.

The relationship between the media and gender is always about agency and structure, especially in a deeply patriarchal society, and the next section deals with this issue.

## **5.2 Structuration and Iraqi Gender Culture**

Classic sociologists and social theorists such as Marx, Weber and Durkheim, have all tried to deal with the question of social structure and individual agency. This is also true about many modern thinkers. This issue is at the heart of social theory, as well as the philosophy of the social sciences. In the past, the relationship between structure and agency "was usually seen as a dualism between individual and society, or the actor and the social system" (Giddens and Pierson 1998: 75). In functionalism and structuralism, social structure is granted primacy over agency; from this perspective, "the constraining qualities of structure are strongly accentuated" (Giddens 1986: 2). In this regard, social structures are viewed as "primary, hard, and immutable, like the girders of a building" (Sewell Jr 1992: 2); whereas



the social processes that they structure are considered to be secondary. Human agency, “the capability to do otherwise” (Giddens and Pierson 1998: 75), is therefore eclipsed. According to this viewpoint, structures exist apart from human actions, yet they determine and shape them. Karl Marx’s famous quote can be seen as representative of this viewpoint: “Man makes his own history, but he does not make it out of the whole cloth; he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself, but out of such as he finds close at hand. The tradition of all past generations weighs like an alp upon the brain of the living” (Marx 2008: 12). Structure is “one of the most... elusive terms in the vocabulary of current social science” (Sewell Jr 1992: 1). As a result, it is very difficult to provide a universal definition of social structure. As a matter of fact, “[u]niversal” notions of structure have been...opposed on both theoretical and empirical grounds” (Kontopoulos 2003: 2). There are, however, features of social life that have been described as being constitutive of social structure.

There is another view, adopted mainly by proponents of interpretative sociologies, that believes in the accentuation of human agency over social structures. In this sense “individuals are regarded as the only constituents of the social world and their actions and reactions, their reasons, motives and beliefs, are the sole ingredients of social explanation” (Thompson 1994: 56). According to this worldview, structures are not particularly prominent and there is not much emphasis on constraint. Social structures are nothing but patterns that are generated by the repeated acts of individuals, giving human agency primacy over social structure, so the argument goes. These individuals are competent agents and they have great knowledge about the social world. Their actions are purposive and reflective; thus, they can provide reasons for what they do.

This dichotomy, which insists on a rigid view of social reality has, however, been contested by another view that believes that instead of looking at the dominance of social structure and human agency over each other, we need to regard them as complementary

terms-as a duality.

What must be grasped is not how structure determines action or how a combination of actions make up structure, but rather how action is structured in everyday contexts and how the structured features of action are, by the very performance of an action, thereby reproduced (Thompson 1994: 56).

The most prominent advocate of this understanding of the social world is Anthony Giddens and his structuration theory, which is best explained in his famous book, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (1986). In this research, I have adopted a conception of society which believes in the duality of structure.

Giddens writes “I mean that social structures are both constituted by human agency, and yet at the same time are the very medium of this constitution” (1979: 121). Every act that results in production is simultaneously engaged in the act of reproduction. The same structure that makes an action possible is, in the performance of that same action, reproduced. Structuration theory sees social life “as a series of ongoing activities and practices that people carry on, which at the same time reproduce larger institutions” (Giddens and Pierson 1998: 76). It does not, however, follow that social structures are static and reproduced in the same form over and over again. In the social world, there are actions that are considered to be disruptive of social order, for example by breaking conventions or challenging established hierarchies. Even these actions are mediated by structural features, which are themselves reproduced by these actions. This reconstitution results in the appearance of a modified form of these structures.

The close connection between production and reproduction is what Giddens calls the ‘recursive character’ of social life. In this regard, structure is viewed as rules and resources

recursively implicated in social reproduction. These social structures in the form of larger institutions are the medium of human activities, as well as the result of them. In this sense, human actions and social structures are not considered as separate concepts that can dominate each other, but as being dual, part of the same processes. Therefore,

'[s]ociety' can be understood as a complex of recurrent practices which form institutions. Those practices depend upon the habits and forms of life which individuals adopt. Individuals don't just 'use' these in their activity but these life practices constitute what that activity is (Giddens and Pierson 1998: 76-77).

Social structures are mainly expressed in what people repeatedly do in a regularised manner. They present some constraints on human behaviour, but at the same time create possibilities through which humans can transform the structures. The structural properties of social systems exist when social actions are reproduced time and again across time and space. They exist to the extent that there are established conventions that people follow.

Structure only exists in so far as people do things knowledgeably and do them in certain contexts that have particular consequences. Those consequences are often ones that they don't themselves foresee or even know about-but it is their regular happening, their reproduction-which makes them structural and allows us to talk of structural effects (Giddens and Pierson 1998: 81).

But what are these structural properties and how do they constrain human activities? These properties have a structural effect on people's actions. They do not have a physical existence, but they can be very fixed and 'hard', such as the structural properties of *ird*. "They depend

upon regularities of social reproduction” (Giddens and Pierson 1998: 77). Obviously, their ‘hardness’ varies from society to society and from community to community. Sometimes they are so strong that can be as powerful as physical coercion, as is the case in some Iraqi communities that strictly abide by concepts of *ird*. *Ird* can confine women to very limited spaces, similar to a physical barrier that does not allow people to pass a specific point.

Nevertheless, life for members of other Iraqi communities might be less shaped by the structural properties of *ird* and, therefore, women in these communities have a greater say on their lifestyles; although it may be the case that their lives are more shaped by other structural qualities such as that of capitalist consumerism. *Ird* is one of these social structures that places constraints on people’s actions in life. Although *ird* gives men the upper hand to shape women’s behaviour in a variety of areas, especially sex, the hegemonic nature of it means that it also presents constraints on men’s attitudes and behaviours as well, directing them towards what is seen as a legitimate lifestyle. But this does not mean that this structure is static and immutable to change. Some of the policies of the successive governments since the final years of the Iraqi monarchy, and also the activities of many social groups, including women’s rights advocacy groups, have challenged many perceptions regarding gender relations in general, and *ird* in particular. For example, the imperatives of the war in the 1980s pushed the government to employ more women, indirectly and possibly unintentionally, challenging the notion of sex segregation deeply embedded in *ird*.

On the other hand, as will be shown in the next two chapters, media consumption by women as a social act also helps reproduce *ird*, albeit in a modified way. Media consumption happens within the boundaries of social structures such as *ird* that places constraints on this act. The same can be true about men reacting to women’s media consumption. Through these acts carried out by women and men, the structure of *ird* is also reproduced. However, some of the acts carried out by women in relation to their media consumption habits, which

challenge the social structure of *ird*, are “mediated by structural features which are reconstituted by the action, albeit in a modified form” (Thompson 1994: 58).

### **5.3 The Methodological Framework: Research Methodology**

From a positivist perspective, the only way to obtain objective, verifiable facts about research participants and their social situations/backgrounds is to carry out a properly conducted investigation. Needless to say, participants may lie or be mistaken during the course of the research. Distortions are not limited to the informants, as researchers themselves are viewed as potential distorting factors. Accordingly, positivism places emphasis on standard questions and the drilling of participants, and the inclination to ignore data that has been created in response to leading questions. Equally important from the positivist perspective is the verifiability of research data. The researcher needs to make sure that the data represents the real situation so that it can be corroborated by other means. Conversely, interpretive research is not necessarily concerned with establishing objective facts, or “the *explanation* of human behaviour”, but rather aims at “*understanding*... human behaviour” (Bryman 201: 28, [italics in original]). Therefore, interpretivism puts a great emphasis on personal perceptions and interpretations of the informants regarding the research topic. Uncovering these perspectives is an important aspect of the research in that it helps the researcher to illuminate a particular issue without necessarily providing a specific quantification or even solution.

My perspective is that different approaches to social research are part of a continuum. At one end of this continuum sits the positivist stance, which is mainly concerned with the extraction of ‘facts’ from the participants’ accounts. It seeks to gain discrete responses from them. The role of the researcher, then, is to construct the questions and direct the discussion in such a way that the participants provide answers to all the questions. The researcher then

uses these answers to construct an account of objective reality, as far as it is possible. A wholly interpretive approach is placed at the other end of this continuum. This approach is only concerned with participants' perceptions and viewpoints on the situation. The researcher then focuses on the processes of the interpretation and meanings of the participants, instead of reaching an absolute account of an objective reality. This research is located between these two extremes. While rejecting the assumptions of positivism, explained above, attempts have been made to remain objective by providing a true account, as far as possible. However, it is recognised that certain claims are always prone to error. I endeavoured to be as objective and non-directive as possible in the course of the investigation, allowing the research participants to speak for themselves. It is recognised that a focus group method would have provided a better opportunity to pursue this objective, but the practical restrictions, which will be explained later on in this chapter, meant that semi-structure interviews was the only alternative option. Interviewees were given the chance to express themselves as far as possible and to present their views and perceptions in relation to the questions.

This research will utilise a qualitative methodology. It will compare, analyse and interpret the primary data that has been gathered from semi-structured interviews. In order to derive meaning for social phenomena, such an analysis goes beyond mere description to a higher level of synthesis.

#### **5.4 Organisation of Qualitative Data**

“Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman 2012: 380). This concern with words is an important feature that distinguishes it from quantitative research. However, the absence of numbers is not the only distinct feature of qualitative research. Qualitative

research strategies can be more effective in research that is concerned with matters such as life history or everyday behaviours. That is why qualitative interviewing has been chosen as the research method here, since media consumption will be explored, which is an everyday practice, as well as its relationship with cultural concepts around gender relations. It is believed that qualitative strategies will be more useful for this, as unlike quantitative strategies that attempt to quantify the data and reduce it to numerical representations, qualitative research can bring about a deeper understanding of the social world through a more thorough examination of social phenomena. For example, a quantitative survey is prone to draw spurious conclusions simply because participants' answers to the questions do not necessarily reflect their behaviours in naturally occurring situations. Therefore, quantitative "researchers who generalize from a sample survey to a larger population ignore the possible disparity between the discourse of actors about some topical issue and the way they respond to questions in a formal context" (Fielding and Fielding 1986: 21).

On the other hand, qualitative research can draw more reliable conclusions by enabling the researcher to explore the social and cultural contexts in which the participants reside and facilitates "the observation of behavior in everyday situation" (Silverman 2003: 32). By utilising qualitative strategies, the researcher attempts to understand "the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants" (ibid). This is why many qualitative researchers strive to view the social world through the eyes of the people they study. Quantitative methods, on the other hand, require "the imposition of predetermined formats on the social world" (Bryman 2012: 403). But as qualitative researchers are committed to seeing the world through the eyes of people, they cannot employ a structured method of data collection, because this will entail an expectation of the social reality that will limit the researcher in their investigation.

Qualitative strategies allow the researcher to integrate the data and also to carry out an in-depth evaluation of variables. Also, qualitative analysis facilitates the organisation of primary data into patterns and analytic units that allow for the comparison of participants' responses, in order to help find answers to the research question(s). Qualitative research "should make decisions on the basis not only of a sound research strategy but also of a sensitivity to the changing contexts and situations in which the research takes place" (Mason 1996: 5). This is because qualitative research tends to understand social life in terms of processes. Although ethnography is mainly associated with an emphasis on processes, other qualitative methods, such as semi-structured and unstructured interviews, can help the researcher to achieve an understanding of social life within a set of processes. Additionally, because in qualitative research the conceptual scope of an investigation is not limited, the researcher is able to achieve a deeper understanding of the social world. As a result, qualitative strategies are more suitable for investigating cultural concepts, such as gender relations. Qualitative research will allow an exploration of the relationship between mediated messages, and cultural norms, concepts and practices around gender relations in Iraq.

## **5.5 Research Method**

To conduct this research, 40 semi-structured interviews with eight different groups of people were conducted.

### **5.5.1 Sampling and Research Participants**

The sampling rationale for the interviews was purposive and was informed by two strands of investigation. First, my experience as an Iraqi citizen who knows the culture and the language and has also has been involved with journalism in regard to the socio-political and economic developments of Iraq; this meant I was aware that I needed to interview members



of a wide range of social groups. In addition, the secondary data that was collected by reviewing the relevant academic literature provided insights into the groups that would best inform the research. These two strands directed the research towards important categories: Firstly, both female and male citizens (age 18 and over) were chosen as the main target group, because the research aimed to investigate the relationship between media and gender relations, and that would ensure interviewing representative of the majority of the population and hence the majority of media consumers. Secondly, representatives from key areas of power and influence in Iraqi society who control wealth, knowledge, the traditional institutions of tribe and religion, and the political arena. The research has drawn upon figures that, although not representative of all working in their field, nonetheless carry significant weight as social actors. It is possible, therefore, to attribute significance to their views and ideas with regard to the relationship between media and gender relations in Iraq, while recognising that they are not exhaustive of Iraqi public opinion, but merely indicative. Six categories of representative from key areas and influence were interviewed: Tribal chiefs, clerics, journalists, university lecturers, elected politicians, and women's rights activists (See Table 5.1).

Category	Number	Location	Total Number	Female	Male
Female Citizens	6	Baghdad	9	9	
	3	Erbil			
Male Citizens	5	Baghdad	7		7
	2	Erbil			
University Lecturers	3	Baghdad	5	2	3
	2	Erbil			
Clerics	2	Baghdad	4		4
	2	Erbil			
Women's Rights Activists	2	Baghdad	3	3	
	1	Erbil			
Tribal Chiefs	2	Baghdad	3		3
	1	Erbil			
Politicians & Government Officials	2	Baghdad	3	1	2
	1	Erbil			
Journalists	4	Baghdad	6	2	4
	2	Erbil			
Total			40	17	23

Table 5.1

Two categories shape and uphold the preponderant traditional cultural values in Iraq. As explained in Chapter Two, tribal chiefs are enormously influential in a deeply tribal society such as Iraq, to the point where they enjoy judicial powers, among other privileges. Religious

leaders, on the other hand, are widely respected. Some of them enjoy great financial, political and even military influence. They uphold the sanctity of society. The four remaining categories also yield influence in society. Journalism has enjoyed a boom in the post-Saddam Iraq. Although journalism is still a dangerous profession in Iraq, journalists have been able to prove their presence in Iraqi affairs, exploiting tens of Iraqi media outlets. Politicians, although not seen as being very successful, have played a crucial role in post-2003 Iraq. University lecturers have access to knowledge. They have been able to gain an increasingly important presence in the media, informing the public on a wide variety of matters. And finally, women's rights activists, although not well supported, have been able to yield influence in an incredibly dangerous environment through both their grassroots activities and also their media presence, attaining international reach. In order to obtain an objective picture, as far as possible, it was decided that, although challenging, it would be necessary to interview representatives from all these eight groups.

I tried to include more female participants, than male ones. This is because in a patriarchal society such as Iraq, women have less access to influential positions and experience marginalisation, hence it was decided to make an effort to hear their voice to get a better sense of the social developments. This proved difficult for several reasons. First as I chose several categories which yield influence, it was difficult to find women, as mainly men occupy these positions. Some categories are men exclusive. For example, women cannot become tribal chiefs or religious leaders. Even in other categories such as journalists it is much easier to find men for interviewing.

Additionally, given the prevalence of gender segregation traditions in the country, finding female 'citizens' who are happy to give interviews was a challenge to. Despite this as it is clear in table 5-1, I was able to talk to more female 'citizens' than male 'citizens'.

The participants were interviewed in two cities: Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, and Erbil, the capital of the Iraqi Kurdistan. Iraq is made up of different ethnicities, but the two main ethnicities in Iraq are Arabs and Kurds. The country is clearly divided into two different political, ethnic and geographical regions-the Arab region, in which the central government in Baghdad retains overall power and authority (although since 2014 seriously challenged by the IS), and the Kurdish region where the Kurdish authorities in Erbil are largely in control. Local authorities have ruled Kurdistan since 1991, following the uprisings that occurred after the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait and the imposition of the no-flight zone over some parts of Iraq, including Kurdistan. In the rest of Iraq, the Ba'ath Party remained in power till 2003 when the Iraqi government was toppled by the coalition forces led by American troops. 12 years of independence of Kurdistan from the central government in Baghdad has led to a variety of different political and social developments in these two regions, combined with the ethnic and cultural differences of the Kurdish people and the Arabs in Iraq. This led to choosing the targeted research groups from these two cities. Practical reasons were behind the decision to choose Baghdad in Arab Iraq and Erbil in the Kurdish region. As I had at the time family in Baghdad, it was decided to select the sample from Baghdad, as I could use their contacts to find participants for the research. It was not really possible for me to find people for interviews from other cities or rural areas, as I did not have any personal contacts in the country. On the other hand, access to the Kurdistan region of Iraq was restricted. Due to the fact that I cannot speak Kurdish, I needed a guarantor to be able to stay in Kurdistan for more than one week. As the only guarantor who was also happy to help me as an interpreter, was a resident of Erbil, I had to interview people from this city. These practical issues circumscribed my access to a broader population. As a result of these restrictions, the interviewees are all urban-based and mainly middle-class people who are not representative of all Iraqis.

I faced two problems in finding suitable candidates for interview. One was the adverse security situation that hindered me from moving freely in a war-torn country and one of the most dangerous countries in the world. The second problem was particularly related to talking to female participants. The honour-based norms meant that I did not have easy access to female participants, particularly from communities with stronger tribal bonds.

Another issue was lack of any systematic method to appeal for participants. It was not possible to use the internet to ask for people who are interested in participating in my research, as this is not a common method for such matters. Even politicians did not have a clear channel through which I could reach out to them. Instead, the traditional networks of family, tribe and friends is very useful in Iraq. As at the time of carrying out my fieldwork I had family in Iraq, I could use their networks to reach out to potential participants. My brother helped me to find many participants, particularly among university students and lecturers in Baghdad. My sister who was a high school teacher at the time, helped me to reach out to religious leaders and tribal chiefs. She was able to do that through her colleagues. For example, one of her colleague's husband, was able to put me in contact with a Sunni imam. My mother was able to reach out to neighbours. She knew a professional woman who lived near my parents' house. An Iraqi colleague in London helped me to find a politician who was willing to talk to me.

In Erbil, I didn't not have any family members. But, my friends helped me make contact with potential interviewees. As, I knew the Iraqi society, I knew that I need to rely on my personal contacts for the purpose of this fieldwork. I went prepared, talked to my family and friends about it, even before I leave the UK to Iraq. In a tribal society such as Iraq, the familial and personal networks play an important role in many aspects of social life.

In Erbil, not only I I was able to get help in terms of finding potential interviewees, but as I don't speak Kurdish, I asked one of my friends to help me communicate with

participants. I was keen to get help from someone who not only speaks Kurdish, but also is familiar with the topics that I study. I was lucky to get help from my friend, Ibrahim, who is a sociologist from Erbil. He was present in my interviews with people who don't speak Arabic and interpreted the questions to the participants and the answers to me.

### **5.5.2 Ethics**

I was able to gain ethical approval from my previous institution (Brunel University<sup>32</sup>). As I was not supposed to interview any 'vulnerable' person, and because Brunel university did not deem my research as sensitive, I was able to complete the process of ethics pretty smoothly. The only issue for Brunel University was the security issues in Iraq; therefore, they asked me to write a letter saying that I am aware of the dangers of traveling to Iraq and conducting research in this country and that I was responsible for my own safety.

I wrote and signed the letter and travelled to Iraq soon after completing the ethics process. Security was the main obstacle that I had to overcome. The city of Erbil was a relatively safe place, but Baghdad was a dangerous city. Also, the road that I took from Erbil to Baghdad was a very dangerous road. Later, the biggest part of that road fell under IS. I tried to be as careful as I can and by Using family and friend's network I was able to avoid unnecessary movements in Baghdad. This meant that I was exposed to less danger. I also had to cancel the idea of interviewing people in other cities in which I didn't have any family.

### **5.5.3 Interview as a Research Method**

Interviews are probably the most widely used method for data collection in qualitative research. Flexibility is one of the most important advantages of this method (Bryman 2012). It was especially important to be able to use a flexible method to collect data, so that any

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<sup>32</sup> I started this degree at Brunel University and later on transferred my studies to Keele University.

unexpected circumstances could be managed in an unsafe and unstable country such as Iraq, where, for example, at any minute a road might be blocked by the security forces. Semi-structured interview:

typically refers to a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview schedule but is able to vary the sequence of questions. The questions are frequently somewhat more general in their frame of reference from that typically found in a structured interview schedule. Also, the interviewer usually has some latitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies (Bryman 2012: 212).

The type of questions posed in this research also another reason for choosing interviews as the method of data collection. It enabled an exploration of people's thoughts on media and whether they believe that as a result of the exposure to media, any changes in their understanding of their social environment and changes in behaviours towards the other sex have occurred. Interviews are particularly useful for exploring people's thoughts on such questions, and are more appropriate for providing a depth of information (Denscombe 2007); especially because, it gives space to the researcher to manoeuvre their approach.

As mentioned above, flexibility is one of the main advantages of qualitative interviews. For example, ethnography, as a method utilised in qualitative research, although it can be very useful, lacks the flexibility that interviews enjoy.

[E]thnography usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews,

collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 3).

Although carrying out ethnographic research can be a very useful way of investigating the social world, its downside is that it usually requires a prolonged period of participant observation, as is clear from the activities that are involved in ethnography. This can be very disruptive as researchers would have to be absent from family or work life for long periods of time. In relation to this research, ethnography may have been a very good method, as the intention was to research perceptions around, and the act of, media consumption in Iraq. As an everyday life activity, media consumption can be easily investigated using ethnography or participant observations. However, in this case in particular, ethnography was by no means a practical option. As the research is about media consumption and gender relations, it would have been necessary to observe people dealing with media content, mainly inside their own homes. Considering the cultural nuances around *ird*, and the emphasis that is put on sex segregation and modest clothing, it would have been practically impossible for me, as a man, to enter people's private spaces to carry out ethnographic research. Also, in order to carry out ethnographic research, I would have had to understand the language of people being observed; but as I cannot speak Kurdish (and many people in Kurdistan do not speak the three languages that I speak), it was not practically possible to carry out ethnographic research in Erbil.

Another common method in social enquiry is the focus group.

The focus group method is a form of group interview in which: there are several participants... there is an emphasis in the questioning on a particular fairly tightly



defined topic; and the accent is upon interaction within the group and the joint construction of meaning (Bryman 2012: 502).

The focus group method can offer many benefits to the researcher. For example, it allows him/her to “develop an understanding about *why* people feel the way they do” (Bryman 2012: 502; *Italics in original*). Instead of asking one participant about the reasons behind his/her view, as happens in individual interviews, focus groups allow participants to engage in probing each other’s reasons for taking a specific stance. Also, focus groups allow the researcher to investigate the ways participants collectively make sense of a social phenomenon; something that cannot be achieved by employing the individual interview method. That is why focus groups provide a useful method for eliciting data in regard to the cultural norms and values of a group. As an important aspect of this research concerns the cultural values that shape gender relations in Iraq, focus groups could have been a very useful method, but unfortunately, practical issues hindered this. In particular, security issues prevented me from organising focus groups. Especially for me as someone who has never lived in Iraq, it was not possible to convince people to attend a focus group session. Even the people that were interviewed were chosen at short notice. I would go with one of my family members (for example my brother) to a place and he would ask people whom he knew if they were happy to talk to me. With an enormous amount of effort, my family members and their contacts were able to arrange meetings with clerics, university lecturers, women’s rights activists, politicians, journalists and tribal chiefs. But because of their status, it was not possible to ask most of these groups to attend a focus group. In Erbil, the security issue was less of a problem, but the absence of my family members and their contacts meant that it was even more difficult to find participants. However, the main problem in organising focus groups in Erbil would have been the language. As I do not speak Kurdish, it was not

possible to conduct a focus group, even if other problems were eliminated. The flexibility of the semi-structured interview as a qualitative method means that even when the situation is far from ideal, as it was in my case, it is still possible to carry out the research. For example, in Erbil it was possible to use an interpreter when interviewing people who speak only Kurdish—a luxury I could not enjoy if carrying out ethnographic research or focus groups.

#### **5.5.4 Semi-structured Interview**

Amongst the different types of qualitative interviews, semi-structured interviews are the most popular in the social sciences. As mentioned previously, one of the advantages of semi-structured interviews over structured interviews is the ability of the interviewer to steer the conversation towards the direction he or she finds important. Instead of sticking to a rigid interview guide, as is the case in structured interviews, the interviewer can divert his or her focus from one topic to another, depending on the participant's responses. This reflexive process could happen during the interview or may result in a shift in focus in future interviews, when the interviewer adds or omits some of the questions in the original interview guide. As an example, in the process of carrying out the interviews in Iraq, it was realised that the interviewees were putting less emphasis on the conflicts that might arise between media users and the government as a result of their access to global media. This is explained by the political reality of Iraq. However, the relationship between media consumption and people's perceptions of the traditional institutions of tribe and religion, and the values they promote and uphold, was very important for the participants. This led to reflecting on the questions, and putting more emphasis on the latter issue.

On the other hand, “compared to unstructured interviews, the interviewer has a greater saying in focusing the conversation on issues that he or she deems important in relation to the research project” (Brinkmann 2013: 21). This feature of semi-structured interviews,

allows the interviewer to carry out the conversation within the boundaries of the issues that he or she sees as being most important to the research. This is particularly important when the time available is limited. For example, for the interviews with politicians, I was told that I had a limited time to interview them. It was quite possible that if I conducted an unstructured interview with them, the time would finish before I even touched upon many important questions that I needed to ask. Therefore, the interview questions were broken down into several parts. The first part of the interview included standard demographic questions. The second part focused on the interviewees' media viewing habits. The questions then proceeded to enquire about participant's views on gender relations and gender equality. It sought to understand participants' conceptions of gender relations and also their thoughts on gender equality in their own society. The third part, which comprised the main body of the questions, focused on the relationship between media and gender relations in Iraq. The overarching theme in the interviews is concerned with the relations between media consumption and gender relations in Iraq, but a conscious effort was also made to allow the interviewees to raise issues not foreseen by the interview guide. The specific interview questions differed for the different groups interviewed. For example, when interviewing politicians, they were asked about the ways their departments deal with gender equality matters. And when interviewing women's rights activists, a section of the interview was dedicated to their activities; a type of question that could not be asked of 'ordinary citizens'. In general, the interview topic guide that addressed the following issues:

- The participants' views on gender equality
- Their attitudes towards media in post-Saddam era
- Their view on women's access to media

- The relationship between commutation media consumption and traditional cultural values
- Media consumption and women's perceptions of themselves
- Media consumption and men's perceptions of women

All of the interviews were audio-recorded. Audio-recording allows the researcher to preserve the original conversation and to have access to the exact words that were said by the interviewees, as opposed to note taking, which will inevitably lead to paraphrasing the account. This was especially useful because the in-depth analysis did not start until all the interviews were finished. In this way, the original account was preserved, and it was possible to transcribe the exact words said by the participants. This also helped me in terms of data security. It is easy to keep several copies of the audio files. I preserved several copies of my interviews. One copy of each interview on my mobile phone, one on my laptop. I also used cloud services to keep my files. I then saved my audio files on two CD's. I kept one of them and gave the second to my brother. All these measures were taken to make sure that I do not lose my files, as it was really difficult and time consuming to come back to a country like Iraq. Technology helped me to do this pretty smoothly as most of these measures do not take much time or effort.

There is a fear that audio recording might inhibit the participants and affect the answers they give. But experience shows that soon after the interview begins, participants forget about the device, especially if a smaller, less intimidating device is used to record the interview (Seidman 2006). A mobile phone was used for the purpose of recording the conversation, and participants were asked if they agreed with this; all agreed, and it appeared that audio-recording posed no problems in the process of interviewing. Each interview took around 45 minutes to finish.

I chose to transcribe all the interviews myself. This proved to be very laborious and time consuming, but it provided me the opportunity of getting to know the material better, as opposed to having them transcribed by someone else. It was intentionally decided not to just listen to the interviews and select sections that seem important, because that would have “[led] to premature judgments about what is important and what is not “(Seidman 2006: 115) and would have led to important sections of the interview data being left out. As all the material was in Arabic (even the Kurdish sections were translated by my friend, during the time of the interview), I did not need to do any translation at this stage.

At this stage, the interviews were ready for in-depth analysis. But before discussing the analysis process, the sampling and some very important methodological issues in relation to the qualitative interview method will be discussed.

## **5.6 Methodological Issues Relating to Interviews**

Like other qualitative research strategies, interviews elicit informants’ perspectives on their own world. During the course of an interview, both the interviewer and the interviewee actively participate in constructing an account of the world. The questions that the researcher asks are informed by his/her worldview and background knowledge and/or experience of the topic. On the other hand, in this process, interviewees actively create meaning. Through their responses, the interviewees offer details of their experience around the topic(s).

Construed as active, the subject behind the respondent not only holds facts and details of experience, but, in the very process of offering them up for response, constructively adds to, takes away from, and transforms the facts and details. The respondent can hardly ‘spoil’ what he or she is, in effect, subjectively creating (Gubrium and Holstein 1997: 117)

Accordingly, it can be reasonably assumed that the interviewees added, took away and transformed some aspects of the accounts they presented. This is mainly because the topic covered was related to their reputation. During the interview, no questions were asked about sex or sexual content broadcast and available in the media, but as all of the participants pointed out matters related to sexual content, this became an important theme of the interviews. In Iraq women's virtue and men's honour is linked to women's sexual conduct and attitude. A 'decent' woman in Iraq is not supposed to be interested in media content that is considered to be sexually provocative, according to the norms. She is not supposed to approve of pre-marital relationships either. Thus, when the female interviewees disapproved of what is viewed as sexually provocative shows, such as dance shows, it was not possible to take their account at face value. Similarly, a man who shows indifference towards his female family members' media consumption implicates himself in lacking *ghira*, as his female kin might watch sexually provocative content. Therefore, when one of the male interviewee stated that he does not allow his daughters to enter a room in which there is an internet-enabled computer, he might be reporting the facts, or equally he might be transforming the facts to avoid the disrepute that comes with lacking *ghira*. In their efforts to answer the questions, the informants started a conversation with me, as the researcher. They were aware that as an Iraqi I am aware of the cultural values that shape gender relations, particularly women's sexual conduct and attitudes. It is very likely that female interviewees considered my gender when they talked about matters related to sex. This is because women who openly talk about sex to men might be considered to be inviting them to have a sexual relationship, and their decency would be questioned. Sometimes when asking a female interviewee to provide more details about what they mean (particularly when they touched upon an issue related to sex), they refrained from that and I was left with more or less one

sentence: “you know what I mean”. This also happened with some male informants, especially when they talked about how Westernised global media has encouraged women to engage in indecent sexual activities. But they normally ‘opened up’ after we got to know each other more during the interview. As a result, some of the interviews with male participants contain very graphic details about sexual encounters and words, while this never happened with the female participants. Nevertheless, when it comes to *ghira*, men seem to be more cautious about the stories they narrate. They are clearly trying to avoid being labelled as lacking *ghira* or being indifferent towards their *ird*. As all men, including me, are supposed to have *ghira*, and since *ird* and *ghira* are concepts that relate to men’s reputation and status, which is mainly evaluated by other men in the same society, the male informants could not afford to risk their reputation by saying something that implied a lack of *ghira*. On the other hand, it is very normal for any human being to be ambivalent about a specific topic or even hold conflicting views. These complicated feelings and convictions are very difficult to express, especially to a stranger who is asking questions. For example, it can be reasonably argued that many of the participants who showed their disapproval of broadcasting what they see as sexually provocative media content, such as dance shows or pornographic content, actually enjoy watching it. For these reasons, the researcher:

should recognise that ambivalence is a fairly common condition of man – that men can and do hold conflicting sentiments at any given time. Furthermore, men hold varying sentiments according to the situations in which they find themselves in (Whyte 1980: 117, cited in Silverman 2003: 112).

It can be argued that participants’ accounts about media content and gender relations can also change depending on the setting in which the conversation takes place. Whether is it a

more formal setting with a strange researcher asking questions, or two old friends discussing the same issue; whether the researcher is a female asking a male participant, or a male researcher asking a female participant. The physical environment in which the interview is conducted can also have an influence on the account narrated by the participant. For example, it was necessary to interview some people in their offices, where other colleagues were present. Although it was preferable to carry out the interview in a room without an audience, this was not always possible. As some of the participants were very difficult to get hold of (for example if they were politicians that had worked on women's issues), it was not possible to replace them and carry out the interview with someone else. Sometimes it was necessary to interview a female participant while a male member of her family was present, as due to the *ird*-related norm of sex segregation, I could not always be in a room alone with a woman. Deciding to only interview women whose male kin would allow her to be with a strange man alone in a room, would have led to a much more diminished representation of the Iraqi population, since the sex segregation norm is a prevalent one in Iraq. It can be reasonably argued, considering the sensitivity and importance and the gravity of the traditional cultural value of *ird*, and its pertinent concepts and values, that the presence of a male relative altered the interview responses received from some of the female participants.

It seems that there are many factors that can alter the outcome of a conversation about the same topic. Consequently, considering conflicting feelings and views, combined with contextual matters and cultural nuances around sexual matters in Iraqi society, it is reasonable to conclude that some of the accounts, both from male and female informants, were transformed to adapt to the context of the interview and/or the cultural context Iraqis live in. In this respect, the interviewees resorted to culturally available resources in order to produce their account. This is explainable by the fact that “[p]articipation in a culture includes participation in the narratives of that culture, a general understanding of the stock



of meanings and their relationships with each other” (Richardson 1990: 24, cited in Silverman 2003: 100). It does not, however, follow that the accounts given by the participants are not valid and cannot help me, as a researcher, to understand the social world. The interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, by itself, can help in analysing the social phenomena under investigation.

The goal is to show how interview responses are produced in the interaction between interviewer and respondent, without losing sight of the meanings produced or the circumstances that condition the meaning-making process. The analytic objective is not merely to describe the situated production of talk, but to show what is being said relates to the experiences and lives being studied (Gubrium and Holstein 1997: 127)

It can be concluded that researchers should not consider interview responses as being true or false. These accounts need to be viewed as “*displays of perspectives and moral forms*” (Silverman 2003: 112; italics in original). The account that is constructed through the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee is reflective of the social world that the participant resides in. The fact that the female participants were less willing to go into the details of sexual behaviour in comparison to the male participants, is reflective of the social and cultural norms and values that shape the society these participants live in. It should be noted that the importance of “the local or situated character of interview talk” (Silverman 2003: 113) will always depends on the topic at hand and also the purpose of the research. For example, it is reasonable to think that the above factors would play a less important role in an anonymous quantitative survey that aims at finding out about patient satisfaction in a hospital.

## 5.7 Data Analysis

Researchers such as Miles and Huberman (1984) and Maxwell (1996), urge that data collection and data analysis should go hand in hand. They believe that the moment a researcher starts generating data, the process of analysing the data begins. This is to allow the two stages to inform each other. Others such as Seidman (2006) advise researchers to delay the process of analysing until they have finished collecting all of the data. This is mainly “to avoid imposing meaning from one participant’s interviews on the next” (Seidman 2006: 113). Completely separating the process of generating data and the process of analysis, however, seems to be unrealistic. “During the interview, the researcher is processing what the participant is saying in order to keep the interview moving forward. Afterward, the researcher mentally reviews each interview in anticipation of the next one” (Seidman 2006: 113).

In this research, after every interview, the questions and answers that were exchanged during the course of that interview were reflected on, and this altered, to a certain extent, the way the next interview was carried out. Transcribing the interviews to prepare them for in depth analysis, however, did not begin until all of the interviews had been conducted and I had left Iraq. This was mainly due to the security situation in war-torn Iraq. It was necessary to make sure that the data was collected as soon as possible to avoid any possible disruptions that might occur in such a volatile country. The interviews generated a lot of data out 40 interviews were carried out, which amounts to a big chunk of data. All of the interviews were transcribed in order to begin the analysis. The first step in the process of analysing the data was to reduce the amount of data. This process of data reduction was an inductive one, so instead of treating the text using a set of hypotheses, the text was examined with an open attitude, looking for themes that could lead to finding answers to the research questions. There was, however, always an awareness that “[a]ll responses to a text are interactions

between the reader and the text” (Seidman 2006: 117), but an attempt was made to be as objective as possible and avoid any possible bias or prejudice to allow the interview text to speak for itself.

Sorting qualitative data is a challenge, mainly because of the sheer volume of data that is produced. Computers and softwares such as NVivo can hugely help in the process of sorting the data. However, it was not possible to gain help from NVivo, for the simple reason that the data was in Arabic and NVivo has problems in processing data in Arabic. Therefore, it was necessary to read the data and try to detect themes that seem to be important to the participants and/or helpful in finding answers to the research questions. The first step in reducing the text is to identify what is important in the transcripts. In this process, the researcher needs to carry out a close reading and apply his or her judgment to identify the areas that seem meaningful. This will help the researcher to find a focus, by applying his or her accumulated knowledge. This, however, is a sensitive issue. The researcher needs to find a focus without prematurely committing himself/herself to a particular perspective. It is important to bear in mind that “in qualitative analysis we should try to suspend beliefs in familiar convictions and examine evidence in a new and critical way” (Dey 2005: 66). It is unrealistic to assume one can approach the text with an empty head. The application of our accumulated knowledge, experience and assumptions seems inevitable, but a researcher needs to be aware of this to be able to approach the text with an open mind.

I embarked on this project with a conviction that global media, as it brings in new ideas about social life after years of isolation, is, to a great extent, is a liberatory force that is being fully embraced by Iraqi people (male and female), and one that is helping women to achieve equality in this patriarchal society. However, during the challenging yet exciting process of data analysis, I realised that this statement is over-simplistic and that cultural nuances play an important role in media consumption, and its potential role in shaping gender relations is

much more complex than what was first thought. These complexities are reflected in the answers that were found to the research questions. This is proof that “it is not helpful to go into data collection burdened with preconceived theories and ideas” (Fane 2003: 49). The fact that the data was treated with an open mind helped in avoiding a misplaced focus during the process of analysis. Finding areas to focus on, however, is not something researchers start with while analysing the data. The process begins at the stage where the researcher conceives the research project, yet throughout the conducting of the research, the focus may be adjusted. In the case of this research project, the initial focus was on women’s status in Iraq and its relationship with global media consumption. But after starting to analyse the interviews, it was realised that the focus needed to shift a little bit towards looking at gender relations. That happened because of the importance of masculinity in the process of media consumption by women in Iraq. There was an awareness from the beginning that in order to understand women’s status, it was also necessary to include men in the interviews. This is why the category male citizens was chosen in addition to female citizens, but in the process of analysing the data, it was realised that more weight needed to be given to men’s role, and that altered, to an extent, the focus of the analysis. Through these processes, the search for themes in the interview text began.

By and large, it can be said that a theme is:

- a category identified by the analyst through his/her data;
- that relates to his/her research focus (and quite possibly the research questions);
- that builds on codes identified in transcripts and/or/ field notes;
- and that provides the researcher with the basis for a theoretical understanding of his or her data that can make a theoretical contribution to the literature related to the research focus (Bryman 2012: 580).

A coding process was performed, because although there are benefits to the coding system, the aim was to analyse the data by “teasing out meaning within its context, or looking for the overall structure in the data” (Spencer *et al.* 2003: 208). Thus, it was possible to identify six main themes:

- Embracing media
- Rejection of media
- Control of the processes of media consumption and use by men
- Women’s resistance to controlling the media consumption and use
- Conflict
- Iraqi/Eastern/Islamic identity vs Western/Westernised identity
- Women’s acceptance of controlling the media consumption and use

These themes have been used as a guide to find relevant literature and theories that would help develop an understanding of the relationship between media and gender relations in Iraq. For example, some of the participants, particularly the men, are concerned about some of the content broadcast through media, and through an in-depth reading of the text produced from the interviews, it was possible to identify some subthemes. The main resistance was towards sexual content, and the main concern was related to its influence on women’s sexual demeanour. Although any form of the word sex or sexuality was not included in the original interview questions, all of the interviewees expressed their concern over this particular issue. This emphasis was very telling. In order to make sense of why sex is so important to Iraqis, I started reading about sexuality in Iraq and the Middle East. I found that the system of *ird* and its relevant concepts is central. This idea was used to re-examine the text of the data to

try and detect some other subthemes related to *ird*. One of the subthemes found was style of dress. The way women dress is very much related to the debate on sexuality, and the system of *ird* demands that men make sure their female kin are dressed ‘modestly’. Dress style and modesty have therefore been considered to be sub-themes. Again, the data was returned to in order to see to what extent these sub-themes are present in the interviews. It was possible to find important elements in the participants’ accounts about their concern regarding the ‘influence’ of media on women’s dress codes. It was also found that another aspect of this resistance is towards content that is concerned with women’s rights. This type of mainly feminist content that is available through the media, which encourages women’s agency, was also viewed as having negative influence on society. Therefore, women’s agency has been considered to be another subtheme under resisting media.

Throughout this inductive process, which was applied throughout the analysis, it was possible to create thematic codes that would enable any discussions related to the research questions to be quickly located, and to help with providing an account of the phenomena that the research is concerned with.

It is worth noting that the majority of the analysis process was done in Arabic, as I did not translate all the content to English. I chose to only translate parts of the interviews that I decided to include in my thesis.

## **Chapter 6: Media and Gender in Iraq: Struggle over Identity**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The media environment in Iraq has witnessed a radical change as a direct result of the 2003 invasion. After years of isolation, Iraqis were able to experience the information technology revolution of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. They largely welcomed this development, but the increasingly globalised media has also brought some problems with it. The question of national identity is a continuous and contested one, and since the early years of the establishment of Iraq, the country has struggled to establish an agreed upon identity. For decades, media was part of this struggle, and it has been used by different regimes to establish and consolidate the ‘right’ identity. In the post-Saddam era, the media is again at the heart of the question of identity from a variety of angles. This chapter will focus on media and Iraqi identity from a gender culture perspective.

Media consumption and use is largely a social activity. It happens inside, rather than outside, social relations, and is done “through the same practices that define our involvement with the rest of everyday life” (Silverstone 2003: 170). Although the advent of technologies such as personal computers, laptops, tablets and mobile phones, and so on, that can be connected to the internet, has enabled media consumption to take place in a more ‘privatised’ manner, media consumption is largely negotiated through social norms and dynamics, including gender relations. The significance of gender in media consumption has been appreciated in many studies (see for instance Morley 1999; Silverstone 2003). In this chapter (and the next) media consumption in Iraq will be examined, and it will be shown that gender relations and gender specific codes of practice play a significant role in shaping media consumption and use, particularly by women. I will demonstrate that although there is an acceptance of media in post-Saddam Iraq and people welcome media technologies and

increasingly use them, there is, at the same time, a kind of resistance or scepticism about its influence on society. The main worries are about media as a corrupting influence, threatening gender specific codes of the society. This mainly concerns men, as they are considered women's guardians and are responsible for protecting the gender-specific values of their families. This is especially contentious because the gender related norms that are shown in Western/Westernised media content appear to be in favour of women's sexual agency; something that is in sharp contrast to Iraqi gender culture. This chapter will demonstrate how satellite TV content and internet technology have enabled a section of Iraqi women to distance themselves from the patriarchal reality of their lives and helped them to circumvent their own gender-specific boundaries. This 'influence' is, however, hugely overestimated! There is also considered to be a negative influence from this media on society, and it is often viewed as being damaging to Iraqi identity.

## **6.2 Media as a Corrupting Influence**

Amongst the interviewees, media was widely seen as the 'transmitter' of sexual immorality. In particular for the male interviewees, women's exposure to satellite TV channels, as well as their access to the internet, is seen as a threat to cultural values around sexual conduct as organised by *ird*. They fear that the modern currents and technologies such as media will transform the traditional cultural values of their society. As explained in Chapter Four, *ird* is a gender specific honour that is mainly linked to a man's female kin's sexual demeanour. According to this concept, which is widespread in Iraq (Human Rights Council 2014), any sexual contact that women have should be strictly limited to their husbands. Any violation of this rule would damage the women's reputation and that of their families. But mainly, the male members of the family take the brunt of this disrepute. They are ashamed and lose their status in society (Dodd 1973; Abu-Rabia 2011). *Ird* and the codes of practice and values that



have been developed around it work as a hegemonic masculine system that restricts women's sexuality to sustain patriarchy and work with different cultural forces in a similar direction. Sexuality is an important site of patriarchy and is even considered the main site of male domination over women (see, Smuts 1995; MacKinnon 1982). Male control over female sexuality in Iraq is facilitated by the hegemonic masculine system of *ird* and its pertinent concepts, which are strongly supported and reinforced by other sites of patriarchy such as culture, represented by tribe and religion, state and violence. In this context, men are the main guardians of *ird* and are responsible for restricting their female kin's sexual conduct to protect their *ird*, through taking a variety of pre-emptive, as well as reparative and corrective, measures that include employing persuasion, threats of violence and using violence.

The interviewees stated that they are mainly worried about the prospect of women being seduced by media content to establish 'inappropriate' sexual relations. Not only porn, but also sexual content in movies and dramas that range from kissing to sexual intercourse, are deemed harmful. Also, moves and dresses that are seen as sexually provocative in music and dance videos are seen to be corrupting female morality. Therefore, they are worried that by having access to the media, women might be under negative influences that teach and/or encourage them to engage in 'inappropriate' sexual behaviour. Both male and female participants shared this concern, while their attitude towards approaching this problem is different, as will be shown later. The main concern is about the 'invasion' of sexual materials entering their private space at home. Ibrahim [high school student, M, Y, B]<sup>33</sup> thinks that women learn sexual behaviour from satellite TV channels: "women's access to satellite [TV] is harming the society, because they learn sexual stuff, dance and stuff and [are encouraged to] wear tight clothes. They learn from the West. This is not compatible with our society".

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<sup>33</sup> [Name, Occupation, Gender, Age (Y: Young; MA: Middle Age; O: Old), Location (B: Baghdad; E: Erbil)]. All names are pseudonyms.

He believes that dresses that are worn by actresses in some of the dramas and movies broadcast on Satellite TV are not compatible with the cultural values of the society, and the fact that women can watch these TV shows has a negative impact on his society. Yunis [Sunni cleric, M, M.A, B] is worried about teenage girl's access to satellite TV channels:

We currently face a problem in girls' high schools. I know a female headmaster who says that they have real problems with mobile phones. Some girls record kissing scenes from TV shows on their mobiles. They even caught girls with porn clips on their phones, and these are by no means rare cases. This is very corruptive for our society. These things have changed our culture. We never had these problems on this scale before. They are threatening our culture, our traditions.

One of the main issues reported by the interviewees, which is a source of concern for them, is imitation; this ranges from imitating dress codes to behaviours that are seen as being incompatible with Iraqi cultural values. Maryam [secondary school student, F, Y, B] explains her views on imitation:

For us Iraqis, satellite TV came as a surprise [it was introduced abruptly] so the negative aspects mainly influenced us. Women started imitating Turkish actresses and so on. When they watch a Khaliiji [Persian Gulf countries] drama, they wear Burqa [a face-veiling piece of clothing]. Then the Turkish drama came, and they started wearing short dresses

Ibrahim [high school student, M, Y, B] voiced similar concerns about imitation: "women have become like women on satellite TV [shows]. They imitate [what they see on TV]".

Riham [member of the Sadr district council and the head of the committee for women and family, F, M.A, B] agrees with the above comments:

As university students we used to wear respectful clothing. We used to wear trousers and didn't cover our hair, but our outfits were respectful. Nowadays, female students wear vulgar clothing... this is all due to satellite TV channels and the music shows and the Western design that has entered our culture.

Zahra [shopkeeper, F, Y, B], on the other hand imitates TV characters in the way they appear: "when I see a girl on TV, I like to dress like her; I like to imitate her, to do my hair like her, and I want to have the same make-up as hers".

Imitation of 'immodest and permissive' dress codes or make up is one of the main concerns voiced by the interviewees, both male and female. Interesting here is that the participants have a view of media as a very strong medium, which influence people as soon as they are exposed to them. This makes media a scary technology and while my participants are fascinated by them and do not want to be prevented from having access to them, they want to find a way to mitigate the 'harm' done by these technologies. An important aspect here is the agreement of both female and male participants, and also of people of different ages, when it comes to their perception of media technology. The fact that they believe that women imitate what they see on the TV or on the internet, shows how this understanding of the relation between media and audience is strong. As will be shown later, this understanding of media 'influence' should not be taken for granted, and a more nuanced analysis is necessary.

It is important to note that one of the codes related to *ird* is modesty, which is viewed as being greatly threatened by the media. *Ird* and *ghira* oblige men to make sure their female

kin dress and behave in a modest manner. The reason modesty, and especially a modest dress code, is so important to the participants, is the fact that it is viewed as the first line of defence against female sexual obscenity. Women are expected to behave and dress in a modest fashion themselves in the first place, and families, especially mothers, are expected to raise modest daughters (Khayyat 1990); however, men must monitor their female kin's behaviour to make sure that they are modest, so that the reputation of the family, and especially male members of the family, remains intact (Dodd 1971; Abu-Rabia 2011). Many of the male informants emphasised that women need to be modest. Sheikh Laith, [senior tribal chief, M, O, B] believes that women need to be modest and that currently Iraqi women who are depicted on TV shows are not as modest as they should be. "Time has changed now," says Sheikh Laith. He continues: "women should be present on TV, but not so permissive in the way they dress. They should be more modest than they are now. It shouldn't be permissive to this extent when it comes to the nudity that currently we are witnessing". Kareem [working in a print shop, M, Y, B] in Baghdad agrees with Sheikh Laith: "women shouldn't dance with short dresses or be shown without hijab on TV. It is nice to watch the gentle sex, but not in this manner. If they are modest, it's OK that women are on TV". Modesty is an important trait for 'decent' women in Iraq. My male informants were worried that media 'impacts' upon women negatively, such as when women imitate characters on TV shows and learn to dress and behave in an 'immodest' manner. Ibrahim [high school student, M, Y, B] expresses his concerns about the influence of TV dramas on women's dress codes:

there are women who used to wear hijab [Islamic cover/veil] from an early age; after they began watching satellite TV and especially Turkish dramas, they abandoned hijab and abaya [a long black piece of clothing worn as a cover by many women in Iraq especially in Arabic areas].

Hussein [PhD candidate in arts, M, Y, B] shares the same concerns: “from people’s behaviours we can understand whether satellite TV has had any influence or not. These days some female students wear flagrant dresses”. He stresses that these dressing styles did not exist until recent times and are the direct result of the proliferation of the media that has happened since 2003. He goes further than that and states that as a result of women’s exposure to satellite TV programmes: “girls are turning their back on moral values” and this has resulted in “a state of decay in moral codes in society”. Mahdi [engineer, M, M.A, B] believes that certain immoral dress codes have appeared as a result of the negative influence of satellite TV programmes:

The dress code has changed. I see mature women in their forties and fifties wearing jeans or doing their eyebrows in a special way. We didn’t have these things before. Satellite TV opened the door to the world. There are TV channels that teach women how to do make up, how to dress.

Striking in these comments is the use of hearsay. Most of the interviewees believed that women’s exposure to the media post-Saddam has changed their behaviour in a way that is not compatible with Iraqi gender-based codes of practices. I was given numerous examples of how these changes are manifested in today’s Iraqi society and this is clear from the comments in this chapter and the next. But, almost no female participant admitted that she had been influenced directly by media. Nor did any of the male participants admit that any female relatives had changed their behaviour. This re-confirms the influence of these values and codes in Iraqi society. In this context, the interview needs to be seen as social performance (Atkinson *et al.* 2003). The interviewees are aware that ‘admitting’ to non-

compliance to *ird*-related norms from their side or their families' side has consequences, hence their use of hearsay. It also shows how in Iraq the violation of these norms is disconcerting and frightening.

Although the purported collapse of *ird*'s first line of defence, manifested in behavioural change that is not in line with the modesty promoted by *ird*, is viewed as a negative influence from the media, for some other informants more direct changes in female sexual behaviour is the main problem. Kareem [working in a print shop, M, Y, B] is mainly concerned about Iraqi women imitating sexual behaviours: "whatever they've [women] seen on TV, they are imitating. They would do all the sexual things they've seen on TV". He continues:

I used to be a shuttle driver. I could hear young girls singing songs full of sexual expressions and swearwords; songs that I, as a man, am ashamed of repeating. Whatever they see on TV they imitate. Once I heard one of my passengers who was a young girl telling her friend that she needs to go to her boyfriend's house and have sex with him or she'll lose him. Married women have started to cheat on their husbands. Their reason: 'well my husband is not enough for me'... This is definitely because of satellite TV. I never saw such things during Saddam's time when these technologies were banned.

If women's media consumption is considered sexually corruptive by some of the informants, and the fact that it encourages them to establish sexual contacts that are against Iraqi gender culture, is a serious concern; for others, using media to actually establish 'illegitimate' sexual contacts is the main problem. When talking about women's access to the internet Hoshang [real estate agent, M, O, E] says:

How are they going to benefit from the internet? There might be some benefits for them, but they are very limited. Obviously, I am talking about women. For men it is very helpful. The problem is that women don't use the internet in an appropriate way. They use it to find boyfriends and love stuff. Women shouldn't have access to the internet.

Hoshiyar [university lecturer in Sociology, M, O, E] talks about how women's access to the internet has helped them to establish what he calls deviant relationships:

The internet is harming our society. Unfortunately, we see deviant behaviours because of the internet. Girls have started unnatural relations with men whom they don't know. We can actually witness deviant behaviours. I mean they establish relations outside marriage; in an unnatural demeanour. If we didn't have this openness and access to the internet and communication technologies, these relations wouldn't have happened.

The above comments show that the participants have a similar understanding, in that sexual modesty is an important aspect of Iraqi culture that should be protected from the 'invasion' of foreign cultures, sneaking in through media. But also, in the fact that they perceive culture as a set of rules and values, codes and practices that can disappear easily or alter greatly as a consequence of exposure to media content. This understanding of the relation between media and culture is similar to that of Daniel Lerner (1958) who presented a unilinear and stagist model that ignores all the complexities of cultural dynamics. It proposes that by being exposed to Western media, people of the Middle East will essentially adopt Western values.

Historically women have been considered as ‘immoral’ or ‘less moral’ beings. Aristotle, for example, considered women inferior to men but above slave: “The slave is wholly lacking the deliberative element; the female has it but it lacks authority” (Aristotle 1260a: 12-14 cited in Nichols: 31). Gilligan (1977) has argued that women are less likely to consider moral dilemmas with regard to individual rights and justice and are mainly concerned with issues regarding relationships with others. Perhaps, Freud’s explanation of women’s inferiority on the realm of morality is the most famous understanding of this issue in modern social sciences. Freud writes:

“I cannot evade the notion (though I hesitate to give it expression) that for women the level of what is ethically normal is different from what it is in men. Their super-ego is never so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origins as we require it to be in men. Character-traits which critics of every epoch have brought up against women – that they show less sense of justice than men, that they are less ready to submit to the great exigencies of life, that they are more often influenced in their judgements by feelings of affection or hostility” (Freud 1925: 257 cited in Thwaites 2007: 108).

This understanding of women’s moral status is very similar to my participants’ understanding of the issue. This is true, particularly about men’s depiction of women’s moral judgement. As my female’s comments mentioned in this thesis show, they, to a great degree, agreed with the statement that, women as ‘emotional beings’ are more prone to the negative ‘influence’ of media on their moral status. But male interviewees’ belief in this statement seemed stronger.

Hegemonic masculinity places men in the position of protectors of ‘weak’ women. Media ‘effects’ argument here depicts women as impressionable people who can be easily



‘influenced’ by what they see in media, hence the need for a guardian to protect them. The fact that my female interviewees bought into this argument shows that women, themselves are convinced that they should be protected by men. The media ‘effects’ argument can be read as a way in which patriarchal arguments are bolstered. Throughout the interviews, the gender-related norms of *ird* are re-asserted with the use of media ‘effects’ arguments.

I will return to this in chapter 7, where I will discuss in more detail narrative practices of gender differentiation, and show how men are attributed traits that are related to reason and culture, when women are disconnected from mind and rationality and linked to nature. In that chapter I will also show how my female participants agree with this argument, by describing women as having “small brains”, supporting the argument that women are ‘influenced’ by the ‘harmful’ media content and in need of protection from ‘wise’ men. As men are ascribed traits such as reason, there is much less concern about the ‘influence’ of media on their morality, as is clear from Hoshang’s comment mentioned above, when he says that he finds media harmful for women, but “for men it is very helpful”

Hoshang’s concerns do not necessarily extend to men. This reflects a gendered sexual double standard which is embedded in Iraqi patriarchal gender culture and is prevalent within Iraqi society, where the sexual activities of men are under much less scrutiny and regulation. This double standard is clearly reflected in Ibrahim’s [high school student, M, Y, B] opinion on dance shows: “it is absolutely normal if men watch dance shows, but women shouldn’t be able to watch them”.

An interesting pattern in the interviews is the agreement (to a great extent) between women and men, regarding *ird*-related matters, including media’s infringing on these codes. Another is the overlap among comments made by different generations. This is a sign of the pervasiveness of these norms in a society such as Iraq. Although this might seem to be an over-generalisation in Western societies, in a tribal society such as Iraq, with strong

collective characteristics, individualism is less pervasive and traditional cultural concepts, such as *ird*, are shared by people from different backgrounds. These codes and values are so strong, that even if someone does not believe in them, it is very difficult for them to ‘confess’ to it. In this case, if a woman admits that she does not believe or abide by *ird*-related codes, she is labelling herself as an immoral woman. If a man admits to such beliefs, he is branding himself as a man who lacks honour, again meaning that he is immoral. For the above reasons, a near agreement can be found among my participants when it comes to these ‘moral’ matters.

The interviewees suggest that satellite TV has helped women change their habits and attitudes towards their dress code, and sexual relations. They also indicate that the internet is used by women to reclaim their sexual agency, bypassing the boundaries set by their male kin to establish sexual relations that are not in line with Iraqi gender culture. The media is presenting an alternative to the traditional attitude towards women’s sexuality, allowing them to distance themselves from their own local reality, where their sexuality is controlled by their male kin.

As explained before, the adverse security situation in Iraq means that women spend more at home. Also, the male dominated public sphere in the country pushes women even more inside homes, meaning they spend more time watching TV or connecting the internet. As it is clear from statements made by my participants, a wide range of scenes and shows available and on TV are considered sexual and inappropriate. The ‘reality’ of Iraqi society determines that women are not exposed to these sorts of ideas and contents. These matters belong to the male-dominated public space and not the private space of homes, which is considered to be suitable for women. What media do is to bring this world of ‘sexual’ ideas to home, blurring the boundaries of public and private and enabling women to distance themselves from the world in which ‘sexual’ content is only for men.

On a different level, the ‘real’ world in Iraq, determines very strict sex segregation rules, according to which the contact between ‘strange’ men and woman is limited. The ‘virtual world’ of the internet allows women to distance themselves from these sex segregation rules, imposed on them in the ‘reality’ of their lives. In short, media provide a world where women can ‘dream about’ and experience the sexual taboos of the Iraqi gender order.

However, it is important to note that “whatever range of imagery they may be familiar with, for most viewers, their ‘horizons of action’ – that sense of the scale on which they can act meaningfully in the world – are still very limited” (Berker *et al.* 2006: 23) because these “global culture forms still have to be made sense of within the context of what, for many people, are still very local forms of life” (ibid). There are other developments in post-Saddam Iraq that confine women’s ‘horizon of action’ but are encouraged and/or facilitated by the media. One of the most important of them is attitudes towards conservatism in society. Due to the post-Saddam “climate of fear and violence there has been an even greater push towards conservative social norms” (Al-Ali 2007: 245). This is part of the struggle over Iraq’s identity that includes a tendency towards Islamic dress code for women. This viewpoint is supported by Layla [clerk in a hospital, F, Y, B]: “We have witnessed a religious surge in the country after the collapse [of Saddam’s regime]. They don’t want women to have a role in society. You know, I mean they prefer women to stay home and be wives and mothers”. It seems that there are two opposing forces in post-Saddam Iraq when it comes to gender culture. One represented by sexualised media content that encourages women not to abide by *ird*-related codes; the other force, which partially feels threatened by the ‘modern’ forces, is the conservative one that has flourished after Saddam and pushes towards a stricter implementation of traditional values, including *ird*.

This state, in which these opposing forces pull society in different directions, is eloquently explained by Narmeen [social researcher at Baghdad Women Association, F, M.A. B]:

We are witnessing a conflict in society as a whole, between religious and liberatory forces, well, it is not necessarily liberatory, but there is a deep change that is happening in society, in the way people think, and media is playing an important role... For example, there is a trend towards leaving hijab, but on the other hand, there is a trend towards wearing hijab, and I would say that the wearing hijab trend is stronger.

Because of the threats that conservative sectors of society feel as a result of the uncontrolled media environment they tend to reassert their traditional cultural values. The religious groups do this through limiting women's presence in public, coercive veiling, etc. At the more private level some men among my participants tend to implement gender cultural values in a stricter manner in regard to their own female kin. Kareem's [working in a print shop, M, Y, B] remarks in this regard are telling:

Satellite TV and mobile phones changed my mind about women. When I started seeing the internet and how girls use it, mobile phones and how they have pictured themselves by their mobiles, I started to doubt... This changed my mind about women. So I hated the idea of marriage [because he couldn't trust any woman not to violate gender specific codes]. And then my family said: 'marry this girl [his current wife], they said she is a 12 years old child; she's not gone out [not seen the world], she is an orphan and she doesn't know even what a mobile phone is, never touched one. She lives with her uncle, who is a cleric in Najaf'. When I married her, I let her watch only three

channels, Kowthar, Anwar and Anwar 2 [all Shia religious channels]. And I have blocked other channels, so that when I'm out at work, she cannot watch other channels. My wife is a child; I don't want her to see these things.

This is a critical era in Iraqi history, where different forces are fighting to determine the identity of Iraq as they see it. Gender culture is an important element of this struggle. This argument will be returned to later, but before that, next section explores the extent to which media is influential in 'modernising' gender culture in post-Saddam Iraq.

### **6.3 Media in Iraq**

There has been 'intermittent attention' paid to the media environment in MENA, as Sreberny (2005) puts it, mainly because the region attracts attention around issues such as terrorism, political upheavals and civil wars, and oil. The Arab spring and the role of the media in its events and developments has encouraged researchers to look at media in the Middle East using a fresh approach, but still this field has not been researched extensively. If 'intermittent' is the right adjective to describe the attention that the media environment receives in MENA, the right adjective for media research in Iraq is 'rare'. Although the abrupt transformation of the media environment in 2003 was quite extraordinary, it has attracted very little academic commentary.

While in the 1990s, in many parts of the world, Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) were developing rapidly and were expanding in many countries, Iraq was almost completely isolated from these developments, mainly due to the Iraqi regime's strict policies on communication technologies. During Saddam's era, the regime had a complete monopoly over print and broadcast media in Iraq (with the exception of Iraqi Kurdistan which has been practically outside the jurisdiction of the Iraqi state since 1991).

Prior to the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Iraqi state owned and controlled all of Iraq's TV and radio stations and newspapers (Kim 2011). The content of these media outlets was strictly monitored and controlled by the state to make sure that it was completely in line with the Ba'ath regime's ideology and objectives (Noor Al-deen 2005). "During the Ba'ath rule, the media were generally shaped by the government's policies. Social and moral values and norms, such as the famous 'Faith Campaign' in the 1990s, were all dictated to the public via the mass media" (Al-Rawi 2012: 17). Additionally, satellite reception was strictly barred in Iraq, preventing Iraqis from accessing TV channels that broadcast from outside the country. Internet service was almost absent during Saddam's era as well. Access to the internet for the public was made possible in 2000 in a very limited scope, and people needed to acquire a special license from the state to be able to connect to the internet. Most users who were able to obtain a license were affiliated to the regime or were at least wealthy enough to pay the high fee of 2000 ID per month, which was almost equivalent to 20% of the average Iraqi's salary at the time. As a result of these conditions and the high price of computers for Iraqis, by 2003, the year of Saddam's fall, only 45000 people out of 28 million Iraqis had access to the internet (Al-Rawi 2012). Even these very limited numbers had access to an internet service whose content was extremely limited, due to the heavily state controlled system of censorship. Ahmad [technician, M, Y, B] recalls those days:

We didn't have real options during the previous regime. Things are completely different now. It's a different world when it comes to these devices. Who dared to think about having satellite TV receivers? They were not available in the market anyways. Computers were a rarity. So expensive ... Mobile phones were something we just heard about. We didn't have these things.

After the fall of Saddam's regime, this picture changed dramatically, resulting in the increasing integration of Iraq into global processes. As a result of the media policies introduced by the CPA and pursued by subsequent central and local governments throughout Iraq, tens of non-state-owned media outlets mushroomed in the country. By 2009, 55 radio stations and 28 television stations at the national, regional, and local levels were working in Iraq (Kim 2011). This environment has given Iraqis a wide range of options to choose from, not only from among Iraqi TV and radio channels broadcast in Arabic and Kurdish, but also from a wide range of Arab and international broadcasters which are in the hundreds (Andary 2007). One BBC report states: "[in] 2013, nearly all Iraqi households have access to satellite television" (Awad and Eaton 2013: 15), giving the Iraqis access to hundreds of satellite TV channels. "With the arrival of the Americans, prohibitions against satellite dishes disappeared; sales soon skyrocketed, leading to one of the highest penetration rates [for satellite broadcasting] in the world" (Amos 2010: 11).

In other parts of the world the story has been very similar, as this has been a global trend: since the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the number of people around the world who have been using the media through satellite broadcasting, as well as those who are connected to the internet, has been progressively rising. By 2015, 3.2 billion people in the world were connected to the internet, with 1.1 billion having access to high-speed internet (The World Bank 2016). Also, since the 1990s, DBS has been progressively reaching larger parts of the world, making communication media truly global (Thompson 2001).

Satellite TV channels constitute the great majority of TV channels that are watched in Iraq, as no cable TV system operates in the country, and terrestrial TV channels are by no means as popular as satellite TV channels. When asked about his ideas about TV viewing in Iraq, Ahmad [technician, M, Y, B] who works for the ministry of environment says: "everybody watches satellite TV these days. There are hundreds of them. Terrestrial TV is

dead. Who watches terrestrial TV? They don't broadcast interesting stuff anyways". In regard to the internet use he stated: "internet is a little different. It's expensive. I mean many people have access to the net nowadays, especially younger people, university students, etc., but you cannot compare it to satellite TV". People in Iraq tend to install satellite dishes in their houses to enjoy a vast array of free TV. Maryam [secondary school student, F, Y, B] is a witness to the high penetration of satellite TV: "you cannot find a house in Iraq without satellite receivers. After 2003 people were suddenly allowed to see the world for the first time, so people rushed to buy satellite [receivers]. And nowadays most houses have more than one satellite [receivers]". Zakiya [teacher, F, M.A, E] indicates that watching satellite TV is an important part of her family's everyday life: "we have five satellite [receivers] at home; three TVs [connected to satellite receivers] on the ground floor and two upstairs". Nowadays satellite TV is one of the main sources of entertainment and also receiving information in Iraq.

There is a myriad of satellite TV channels available for free for Iraqi people. In addition to that, a variety of methods are cheaply available for Iraqis to 'illegally' watch paid satellite channels too. The cost of buying and installing satellite TV receivers is relatively cheap for a country with a Gross National Income per capita of 6320 US dollars in 2014 (The World Bank). In his free time, Ahmad [Technician, M, Y, B] installs satellite TV receivers and dishes for extra income. He estimates that the "average price for a normal receiver and dish that does not remotely orbit and only catches one satellite is 45000 IRD [around 40 US\$]". This amount would be paid once, as there is no monthly fee for using most of the channels broadcast in Arabic and Kurdish; also, there is no television taxation in Iraq. The above statistics and comments show the centrality of television viewing, and especially satellite TV, in Iraqi households. It is difficult to talk about homes in many parts of the world without considering media technologies such as television.



Television has become embedded in the complex cultures of our own domesticity. We can no more think of television as anything other than a necessary component of that domesticity than we can think of our domesticity without seeing both in the machine and the screen a reflection and an expression of that domestic life (Silverstone 2003: 24).

On the other hand, as in many other countries and regions around the world, the internet connection is expanding rapidly in Iraq. By November 2015, 11 million Iraqis had access to the internet, making it the third ranked country in the Middle East in terms of population with internet access (Internet World Stats, 2015). This is when adopting a broad definition for internet users, such as “anyone currently in capacity to use the Internet”. This is a person who meets the following two requirements “(1) [has]...access to an Internet Connection point (2) [has] the basic knowledge required to use web technology” (Internet World Stats 2016). Other sources that adopt less broad definitions put Iraqi internet users at over 4,8,00,000 in 2016 (Internet Live Stats 2016b). Whichever statistics are agreed upon, it is clear that the use of the internet is rapidly expanding in Iraq.

Other types of entertainment are not as cheap or as available as satellite TV channels and the internet, for a variety of reasons. Iraq has been suffering from devastating wars and crippling sanctions since the early 1980s. This has left all the infrastructure in Iraq in a dire condition, including infrastructure in relation to entertainment, such as parks, cinemas, theatres, and so on. In addition, the adverse security situation in Iraq has forced many people to stay at home and watch TV (Alwan 2014). In particular, women have been affected most by this adverse security situation and their movements have been greatly limited-far more than men. Sadiya [housewife, F, Y, B] explains: “you know the situation in Baghdad,

explosions and kidnappings etc. We have to be careful. Sometimes the best thing to do is just stay at home. That's why I spend so much time watching TV". Regardless of the security situation or lack of suitable spaces for entertainment, women's access to public spaces is limited compared to men's, due to Iraq's patriarchal gender culture. That is why in a city such as Erbil, which is considered a relatively safe city, women are still largely confined to their homes. Women, as the bearers of men's sexual honour, *ird*, have to comply with many norms such as sex segregation (Khayyat 1990). It is preferred that women have as little contact as possible with non-*mahrams*. Public space in many countries in the region, including Iraq:

has been, and in many places remains, male space. Women are often required to enter it veiled, covered by the rubrics of religious decency and appropriate relations between the sexes, work and shop under a male ethos, and return to the female arena of the interior (Sreberny 2005: 64).

Therefore, for many Iraqis the best place for women is the home, where they can stay protected from any 'inappropriate' approaches by men. Maryam [secondary school student, F, Y, B] talks about the limited number of public places where women can have fun due to sex segregation: "entertainment places are mostly for men. We as women cannot go alone to many places. We have to be with our families, otherwise they look at us in a bad way. There are limited places to go anyway, so we stick to the TV". All these factors leave women with no option but to spend most of their time at home, especially as the vast majority of Iraqi women are not working in paid jobs outside their homes (United Nations Joint Analysis Unit Iraq 2012). Iraqi gender norms, problems with infrastructure, as well as the adverse security situation, limiting Iraqis' entertainment options and rendering the home one of the

safest places for leisure. But this is not peculiar to Iraq; in other parts of the world too, “[t]he home has increasingly become the site for entertainment” (Gray 2013: 503). This is particularly true for women where “the domestic sphere is increasingly becoming defined as their only leisure space” (ibid).

This abrupt change in the media environment means that Iraq is now connected to the Arab Media environment, which has witnessed huge transformations during the past twenty-five years. The Arabic language and cultural similarities means that Iraqis now are not only connected to the increasing numbers of Iraqi media outlets (in Arabic and Kurdish), but also to hundreds of satellite TV channels broadcast in Arabic. The lack of government restrictions on media consumption and use also means that Iraq could be increasingly connected to the internet. However, the poor quality of the infrastructure that provides the internet service has caused Iraq to lag behind most of its neighbours, yet Iraq has had the opportunity to experience the internet as it has been expanding rapidly since the turn of the century. Successive post-Saddam governments have not had any clear policy on the media. Therefore, while almost all countries in the region implement some kind of censorship or control over specific aspects of media technologies, Iraq is a space where media can be used freely with no state intervention. Unlike Iran, there is no law that prevents Iraqis from purchasing satellite receivers. The same is true about connecting to the internet. There is no state censorship of the internet and unlike countries such as Iran, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, social networking apps such as WhatsApp and Viber can be used with no restrictions. Iraqi activists from all backgrounds appear on TV and use the internet to pursue their goals, because there is no law against it. This is not to say that media activities do not have their dangers in Iraq. However, it is fair to say that the media environment in Iraq is freer than most of the countries in the region, as very harsh criticism of the government and other state institutions can be easily heard on TV and the internet every single day. People use social

media to organise demonstrations and use them as platforms to debate sensitive social, cultural and political matters, creating a vibrant public space, which is hard to come by in other countries in the region.

Not only are the Iraqi government in Baghdad and the regional government in Erbil less concerned or less able to curtail people's usage of media technologies as public spaces, compared to neighbouring countries, these governments have implemented no measures to 'mitigate' the media influence on their culture either. Although in September 2015 the Iraqi parliament passed a law that allowed blocking pornographic content, there have been no real steps taken to implement the law. There is absolutely no censorship of the internet in Iraq. Even the types of measures that deal with pornographic websites in Britain, which ask internet providers to block porn websites by default, and only unblock them upon an adult user's request, does not exist in Iraq. Also, unlike countries in the region and even countries such as Britain that have criminalised watching certain pornographic content such as child pornography, rape or bestiality, there is no law in Iraq criminalising watching this type of content.

There have, however, been restrictions on the way journalists operate in Iraq. The biggest problem is the security situation. Assassinations are daily occurrences in Iraq. Journalists have been victims of these assassinations, and this includes in Kurdistan. Since 2003 tens of Iraqi media workers and journalists have been abducted and killed, and many have fled the country. Whether these crimes have been committed by the governments in Erbil or Baghdad, it is hard to tell, especially in an environment where the political factions that form the government run militias and other types of armed groups. Another problem is that the post-2003 media environment in Iraq is extremely partisan (Kim and Hama-Saeed 2008). It is difficult to obtain accurate information about the ownership of media outlets, but it is clear that political groups, mainly Islamist parties, own many of them. "The ruling Dawa

party, for example, is believed to own and operate, directly or indirectly, a number of [TV] channels and even these are believed to have been divided along inner party splits” (Awad and Eaton 2013: 25). As most post-Saddam media outlets are “driven by sectarianism” (Cochrane 2006, cited in Al-Rawi 2012: 64) they have been an important element in the sectarian conflict of post-Saddam Iraq. They have been used as propaganda tools to march in support of the sect that the owners of the channels belong to, rendering them “an integral part of the conflict” (Al-Rawi 2012: 64). Although many conservative groups exploit media environment to further their goals, at the same time they oppose many aspects of it that are seen as threat to the culture of the country. Clerics and Islamic party members always warn about the negative influence of foreign culture on Iraqi society. They have also been instrumental in helping consolidate a traditional Islamist worldview within social spheres. For example, patriarchal sentiments have been disseminated on a large scale by these satellite channels, as they believe it is in line with Iraq’s traditions and values. In the struggle over the identity of the country and nation, media outlets have been extensively used by a variety of political factions. As the regime change has highly benefited the political parties that took over in 2003 in terms of financial gains, they can now afford to launch a variety of media outlets. They have the resources to be active in the virtual environment as well, dominating the media environment in Iraq and marginalising independent voices. On the other hand, the sectarian and religious pressures have greatly influenced the way journalists and producers work. The numerous red lines, especially around some religious figures who are considered to be holy and untouchable, means that journalists think twice about what they are going to say. Journalists have faced numerous lawsuits in an attempt to silence them, particularly under Prime Minister Nuri AL Maliki (2006-2014). There are doubts about the independence of the judicial system in Iraq, as these lawsuits have been successful in silencing some journalists. This has created an environment of intimidation that has hindered

free speech in Iraq. It is however important to note that the global nature of modern media has allowed journalists who find it impossible or hard to work inside Iraq, to join Iraqi TV channels outside the country. Countries like Jordan, Egypt and Syria have hosted many Iraqi satellite TV channels. As there are no restrictions on receiving satellite channels, Iraqis are able to watch them. Needless to say, the internet has also created an environment for media experts to make themselves heard from outside the country. The Jordan based Iraqi satirist, Ahmed Al-Basheer, started his increasingly popular comedy show, Albasheer Show, in 2014, using YouTube as its platform. In his show he covers Iraqi social and political developments, mocking the ruling elites in a way never seen before in Iraq. Two years later two Arabic speaking channels, the Kurdistan based NRT Arabic and German based Deutsche Welle (DW) Arabic, began broadcasting his show simultaneously each Friday. It is also published on YouTube, as it was before. This is a unique show in the MENA, broadcasting from inside the region. Bassem Youssef's 'The Show', a very successful Egyptian comedy show, was closed down due to pressure from the government. Later on, Bassem Youssef emigrated to the US.

It seems that many sectors in Iraqi society, including the traditionalists and conservatives, have embraced the post-Saddam media environment. All of the interviewees agreed that having access to the media is beneficial to them and the wider society in one way or another. In this regard, Hameed [Sunni cleric, M, M.A, E] believes that society needs to embrace the internet, because it is important for "scientific purposes and various developments in life". Like many other interviewees, Shahad [university lecturer at the college of art, F, Y, B] shows enthusiasm for satellite TV. She thinks that media is not only useful, but an essential element in the modern era:

We used to be isolated [under Saddam]. We used to have one or two channels and

these channels would give us what they wanted, as a result, our level of thinking was limited to what the media wanted us to know. But the proliferation of satellite TV has developed us, developed our culture and many other aspects of life. Media is an essential part of modern life; it is a necessity.

The high rate of TV access in Iraq, as well as the fast growth of the internet, and also the unanimous agreement from all the interviewees from various backgrounds, shows that Iraqis have truly embraced media post 2003. This welcoming, nevertheless, is not a full-fledged one. There seems to be a resistance towards accepting some media forms and/or content; a resistance motivated, mainly, by gender specific values seen as traditional and viewed as important elements of the Iraqi identity.

#### **6.4 Global Media, Local Context**

In order to understand the relationship between media and Iraqi cultural values pertinent to gender, one needs to pay attention to the local context in which this media content is consumed. “[M]edia recipients are not empty vessels into which media content can simply be poured” (Ayaß 2012: 2), as the earlier studies on media effects suggest. It is clear that communication and information are increasingly diffused globally; yet the local contexts in which the receivers are situated in play an important role in interpreting these symbolic materials. In order to understand the process of appropriation of the media products, it is important to pay attention to the specific spatio-temporal locales the consumers live in.

The appropriation of media products is always a localized phenomenon, in the sense that it always involves specific individuals who are situated in particular social-

historical contexts, and who draw on the resources available to them in order to make sense of media messages and incorporate them into their lives (Thompson 2001: 174).

Individuals adapt media messages to their own practical contexts of everyday life. Through this process of ‘globalised diffusion and localized appropriation’ of media content the messages are transformed. Although media content are being circulated on an increasingly global scale, the process of appropriation still remains intrinsically contextual, which indicates the importance of the context of reception in the process of reception. On the other hand, the global diffusion of communication and information technology gives people the opportunity to distance themselves from their local reality and their day-to-day conditions, symbolically and imaginatively, by creating an alternative cultural space, turning locales to sites where globalised media content is received, interpreted and incorporated into the reality of people’s everyday life. This process of appropriation of globalised symbolic materials involves what Thompson calls “*accentuation of symbolic distancing from the spatial-temporal contexts of everyday life*” (Thompson 2001: 175, italics in original). Through the global diffusion of media products, people are able to gain a partial understanding of alternative lifestyles elsewhere. Images of alternative lifestyles give the audience the opportunity to critically think about their own life conditions, by comparing their own lives with those prevailing in other parts of the world. This is especially important for Iraqi viewers, as some aspects of their own lifestyles are substantially different from the dominant pictures in the media. For example, the accepted norms and attitudes towards gender and sexuality compatible with Iraqi traditional cultural values are in sharp contrast to those portrayed in the popular media products mainly produced in the West, and particularly the US, but also in the region as will be shown later. This issue has become more important, especially when we realise that portrayals of sexuality in media products which cover a wide



range of content, from ‘erotic’ material to hardcore pornography, diffused globally, are on the increase with ever-increasing ease of access for audiences (Jackson and Barlett 2009; Brown 2002; Adolescents 2012) in many parts of the world, including Iraq.

The picture of the ‘modern family’ and gender relations that regulate these families where women are much more independent, diverge enormously from the traditional gender culture in Iraq. These media products give Iraqis the chance to distance “themselves from their own life conditions and, at the same time... [help them] gain a critical purchase on official interpretations of social and political reality, both in their own country and elsewhere” (Thompson 2001: 176).

This localised appropriation of media products, however, can be a source of tension, as will be shown in Chapter Seven, mainly because the picture that is conveyed through the media clashes with the traditional Iraqi lifestyle and the accepted norms supported and disseminated by the traditional institutions of tribe and religion. This divergence can be appealing, especially for less powerful sections of society, in this case women, who are dominated by other groups and find in globalised media a chance to distance themselves from their own oppressive reality. The dominant groups however, in this case men, might not be happy with allowing this to happen, as they see these symbolic messages in alternative lifestyles as threatening their authority.

However, the increasing proliferation of media technologies and globalised media can also be a source of strength for traditional institutions, as the process of the appropriation of globalised media content can interact with localised patterns and consolidate the existing power relations. This is clear in Iraq where the old-established traditional institutions of religion have been quick to exploit the new free media environment in Iraq after 2003 and use their money and network of audiences to launch their own satellite TV channels as well as websites. As explained in Chapter Two, for example, Ayatollah Sistani has a popular

website that is available in seven different languages. A quick look at the Iraqi satellite TV channels list makes it clear that religious characters as well as institutions have a very active presence in media in Iraq. But equally important is the variety of non-Iraqi religion-oriented channels broadcasting from the neighbouring countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and so on; these channels are busy reiterating traditional cultural values that are in contrast to the values diffused by other channels, mainly showing Western media products or products produced in regional countries but seen to be disseminating Western values. One set of media content presents an alternative lifestyle and allows audiences to gain a critical view of their local lifestyle, values and norms, while another set of media products engages in consolidating these local values and norms. This diversity in media messages can cause self-conflict because individuals might experience a clash of values. "Individuals are constantly involved in trying to reconcile, or simply hold in an uneasy balance, messages which conflict with one another or with the values and beliefs embedded in the routine practices of their daily lives" (Thompson 2001: 177).

There is a clear divergence between what is expected in gender relations (what it is to be a man and a woman) in the cultural norms and values of the local reality of Iraqis, which are also disseminated by media outlets owned and run by traditionalists, and the gender relations and expectations of sexuality disseminated through the media, either by the sexualised consumer oriented Western style media content, or by feminist groups' rhetoric. These conflicting symbolic messages and contrasts in values disseminated by competing media makes the process of appropriation of symbolic messages more complicated and brings the question of the identity, of who Iraqis are to the fore.

## **6.5 Media and Iraqi Identity**

It is clear that large sectors people in Iraq are worried about what they perceive as the

negative influence of the Western/Westernised media on their local traditional cultural values, particularly those related to gender relations. That is evident from my participants' responses, but also from the numerous media reports and cleric's comments on this issue. It is also clear that women's media consumption is a contentious matter that provides an environment for serious conflict in Iraq, particularly inside families. But, it is important to note that the free environment that gave the opportunity for what is perceived as Western media products to enter Iraqi households post 2003, has also provided the right setting for traditionalists to hugely invest in their presence in a variety of media outlets to disseminate their own religious and political ideologies. In this regard, Layla [clerk in a hospital, F, Y, B] emphasised the ubiquity of the religious rhetoric amongst Arabic speaking satellite TV channels: "It is not as if you are only exposed to Western shows on satellite TV. There are tens of religious channels available in Iraq. Iraqi, Iranian, Egyptian, Saudi, Lebanese, you name it. And there are many people that actually follow them". Zakiya [teacher, F, M.A, E] mainly watches Kurdish speaking religious channels. When asked about her media use, she proudly says:

I mainly listen to Quran. I also follow religious sermons on TV. If I have time I would listen to the news bulletin too, but mainly Quran. I switch to religious channels and listen to Quran for hours. While I'm working at home, cleaning, cooking, even when I'm on the second floor, the TV is on and I can hear Quran.

In fact, religious channels are so influential for Zakiya that they helped persuade her to change her behaviour:

Previously, I used not to wear Hijab. I used to wear normal clothing such as blouses

and skirts. But after the satellite TV came, I started watching religious TV channels. I started to implement [what is preached in these TV channels]. I personally apply many things I learn from satellite TVs, such as wearing hijab and reading Quran. I memorised five sections of Quran. I practice many things that I've learnt from satellite TV channels.

This change in behaviour towards a more traditional lifestyle influenced by media, is also reported by Riham [member of the Sadr district council and the head of the committee for women and family, F, M.A, B]: "Religious satellite TV channels, they propagate religion and have influenced young men in Sadr city [a poor mainly Shia district in Baghdad], because of this, they are increasingly prejudiced. They are stricter with their sisters, wives, etc". As explained before, since the 1990s, Iraqi society has witnessed a surge in religious, as well as tribal values as a result of Saddam's regime strategy of resisting the harsh sanctions that were imposed on Iraq. After the fall of the regime in 2003, this trend was intensified mainly due to the proliferation of religious groups and institutions and the polarisation of the sectarian groups who are fighting to impose their own version of cultural identity. This has also been reflected in media spheres as these groups have exploited the new media environment to consolidate their power (Al-Rawi 2012). It is difficult to say whether the young men of Sadr city were directly 'influenced' by these religious media outlets in becoming stricter in observing values related to *ird*, but it is clear that the post 2003 religious media have been instrumental in the dissemination of traditional cultural values and highlighting them as part of the cultural identity of the Iraqi people. Identity is increasingly important in many parts of the world.

There has been an increased interest in cultural identity in recent years, particularly as

cultural identities undergo constant transformation. We live in a world where identity matters. It matters both as a concept, theoretically, and as a contested fact of contemporary political life. The word itself has acquired a huge contemporary resonance, inside and outside the academic world (Gilroy 1997: 301).

The relationship between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is key in understanding identity. In particular, cultural identity is important in obtaining a sense of self in relations to others. Identity “reflects the way people position themselves in society and on how meaning is attached to this position.” (Verkuyten 1999: 5). Identity is a fluid notion, and as there is a historical dimension to it, like everything that is historic it undergoes transformation, “[t]herefore, changes in society, being political, economical, demographic or cultural, all have their impact on identity” (ibid). Abrupt and dramatic changes, such as the regime change in Iraq, in particular, can intensify the struggle around identity. This is more apparent when a particular identity is viewed as being under threat. "Identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty" (Mercer, 1990, p. 43). As explained previously, various sectors in Middle Eastern societies feel that their ‘old-established’ and ‘fixed’ identity is under threat from what is perceived as the West. And in this war on their cultural identity, the media plays a pivotal role. This idea enjoys a shared concern between the regimes in the region and the public. Gender culture especially, is seen as being under threat by a media that is spreading Western sexual ‘immorality’.

In order to distinguish their culture, the interviewees used three terms: Iraqi, Muslim, and Oriental (Eastern) and they place their identity against Western identity. Cultural identities reproduce common historical experiences. Also important in cultural identity is shared cultural codes through which a sense of being ‘one people’ is created. This sense of ‘one

people' is clear in the participants' comments. This 'one people' is set against 'another people', which in this case are Western. Interestingly, the world is divided into two spheres: the world of Islam or the East (mainly Islamic societies) of which Iraq is seen as a part, and the West or people who are seen as being willing to follow the West, the Westernised people/societies. This is particularly important in the media, as the West or Westernised ideas are seen as dominant in media content production. This dichotomy is clear in Riham's [member of the Sadr district council and the head of the committee for women and family, F, M.A, B] mind when it comes to the media. After showing discontent with the cultural changes that have taken place in Iraqi society due to the proliferation of what she believes are Western cultural products, Riham says: "these things are not in our nature. This is all because of satellite channels and music shows and the Western design that entered our culture. They invaded us". She continues: "we as an Eastern society have our own traditions and customs, and education and upbringing". When talking about 'us' (the Iraqis) she emphasises traditions and customs. It seems that she believes these traditions and customs are important components of Iraqi culture. When asked if she thinks Iraqi women should become like women on global TV shows, she answers:

Of course not, they are different. You see on Iraqi channels, most of the female presenters and even the actresses, except some rare examples, are decent and respect themselves. Because we have, as I told you before, traditions and customs that rule us. Even if she is an actress, at the end of the day she's Iraqi and there are traditions that she respects.

For Kareem [working in a print shop, M, Y, B] Islamic values are of utmost importance as he mentions them several times and creates a dichotomy of Islam/Islamic vs. the West:

There are satellite channels such as Anwar and Kowthar, these are religious channels and it is possible for a woman to watch them. They are Islamic and teach women about religion. But women shouldn't watch channels that show dance shows and they shouldn't watch Western channels, and you know what kind of TV channels these are.

Ibrahim [high school student, M, Y, B] links women's rights to Islam, emphasising the importance of religion in Iraqi culture: "In Islam women get half the inheritance men get". He too doesn't like to trade this Islamic culture with a Western one: "We live in an Islamic society. Women shouldn't become like Western women. This is happening now. This helps the spread of [sexual] corruption". Additionally, Ibrahim believes that the internet is a source of conflict between women and Islamic values: "Women refer to the internet and TV rather than their religion... many of websites are un-Islamic". For him tradition in the form of the religion of Islam is very important and what he perceives as Western culture intruding through media is a threat to the local culture and identity. He continues: "this is harming the society... because women are learning from the West and this is not compatible with our society". Ibrahim repeats this opinion when asked about the internet, as he believes that internet use by women is harming society "they [women] learn Western attitudes. This corrupts our society".

As explained earlier, Western/Westernised culture is seen as indecent and vulgar when it comes to attitudes towards sex. In this regard Kareem [working in a print shop, M, Y, B] says: "For Europeans cheating is normal. I watched a movie the other day. There was a wedding, the bride opened the door and she saw her husband sleeping with her mother. This is unbelievable". Islamic/Eastern/Iraqi culture, on the other hand, is seen as decent regarding sexual demeanour and needs to be protected from the indecent Western culture. Kareem

continues “Iraqi women shouldn’t try to imitate Western women, nor should Iraqi society become like the Western societies in regard to women”. He believes that Western women are not decent, and he is not happy to see Iraqi women becoming like them. In fact, Kareem’s main objection to the proliferation of media is that Iraqi women will turn Western, and by that he means adopting Western attitudes towards sex. Another comment that emphasises a clear distinction between Iraqi and Western culture was made by Sara [engineer works in a factory, as well as working for the Baghdad city council as a consultant, F, M.A, B]. For her, Islam is the source of this distinction. Due to the nature of her profession, she has travelled a lot, including to European countries. She praises Western women because of what she calls “their independence”. When asked if she wanted to see this happen in Iraq she said: “Well our religion is different. We have religious boundaries and we cannot bypass them”. On the other hand, Maysoon [journalist, F, Y, B] also thinks that traditions are influential players in Iraqi society. But she talks about them (specifically religion) in a negative tone. When asked if she believes that there is discrimination against women in Iraq, she says:

A lot, especially after the Islamic and religious tides. Religious currents greatly restrict women’s role. I mean they propagate the idea that women’s role is only to get married and have babies and be a housewife and take care of her husband. [So] the other side of women is non-existent. There’s no social, political, artistic or cultural interest for women [in their opinion] ...a woman can be successful both at home and in society, why not?

Maysoon is very clear about the fact that women should participate fully in society and should not be limited to domestic roles. However, she has also concerns about the ‘influence’ of media on sexual demeanour of people and thinks that some satellite TV programmes offer



content that are ‘not for us’ [Iraqis]: “Some people imitate stuff [from satellite TV] that is not for us, such as imitating Turkish dramas. Some of these dramas show things that are morally deviant; they show some immoral behaviours”. Once again, Western culture is seen as sexually deviant, whereas Iraqi culture is moral. Although Maysoon is critical of religion as a source of traditional values in Iraq, her observations about sexual demeanour are in line with Iraqi gender culture, which is greatly shaped by religion. Turkish culture is seen as very much Westernised and therefore not sexually moral to a great extent. In this regard Mahdi’s [engineer, M, M.A, B] remarks are interesting: “Turkey is a Muslim country in name only. It is not a real Muslim country like our country. In essence, Turkey is a Western society. This is clear from their soap operas”. Any media content that portrays sexual attitudes or behaviour that is perceived as being permissive, or not in line with the Iraqi gender culture, is considered Western, even if it is produced in a Muslim majority country. Mahdi also placed great emphasis on the Islamic identity of Iraqi people: “We are Muslims and live in a Muslim country and we have an inveterate Islamic history and heritage”. When asked in which area men have more rights than women (a point he previously made) he places societies into two categories:

...take for example dress code. Men can wear whatever they want, women cannot. But we can say there are two types of societies, conservative [societies] in which women don’t have the right to wear as they wish. There are also liberal societies, as they call them; for them this is normal; women can wear jeans and t-shirts.

It is clear that modesty in behaviour and dress for women, and other values and norms that are in line with and promoted Iraqi gender culture, constitute an important part of identity for Iraqi people, including women. Media that broadcast materials that are not in line with

traditional cultural values, although popular, sometimes face resistance amongst women themselves. According to Riham [member of the Sadr district council and the head of the committee for women and family, F, M.A, B] this is a source of internal conflict for many women in Iraq: “It causes an internal conflict for women. She desires to do these things, but she has traditions and customs and religion and values that prevent her doing these things that she sees on TV, that encourage her to do them. So, some sort of internal conflict is created”.

Consequently, it is necessary to bear in mind that curbing women’s access to media content that are seen as being against local gender culture, is not simply a matter of the act of an oppressor group that is imposed upon the oppressed group by force and that faces outright rejection by the latter. As mentioned in Chapter Four, for hegemonic masculinity to successfully help sustain patriarchy, there must be a degree of complicity by women themselves. As will be shown in the next chapter, men rely on value systems that are shared by women to pursue their goal of protecting *ird* from the threat of the media. In addition to domestication, threats of violence and inflicting actual violence, men resort to a subtler strategy based on persuasion. This strategy exploits women’s Iraqi identity informed by traditional values in order to peacefully convince them to self-censor content that are not compatible with the Iraqi gender culture.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown how the media environment has transformed after the collapse of the Iraqi regime in 2003. Nowadays, the media is used by millions of Iraqis. Those in power, mainly conservative groups, have realised that in a modern world they need to invest in media in order to further their cause. There are, however, aspects of this free media environment that concerns Iraqis. This is mainly related to what is seen as sexualised media

content. This type of content is seen as damaging the traditional values of Iraqi society, and as corrupting people's morality. Women in particular are seen as vulnerable and prone to being damaged by sexualised media content and the possibilities that the internet provides to behave in a way that is against Iraqi gender culture. They are seen as imitating what they see in the media. Although there is evidence that shows the opening up of the media environment has given women in Iraq the opportunity to distance themselves from their local reality and the restrictions on their lives, they consume and use media in a heavily patriarchal environment that is keen to curtail their sexual agency to protect what is seen as salient traditional values.

The most harmful media content is considered to be 'Western'. Essentially any media products that are seen as against Iraqi gender culture are considered Westernised, and this includes non-Western media products. Iraqi cultural values around gender are in sharp contrast to the pictures and ideas that are disseminated in Western/Westernised media content. For the interviewees, this clash is related to Iraqi identity. Iraqis are seen as being different to Westerners when it comes to gender relations, and Iraqi identity is viewed as being under threat from alien cultural values.

Before I embarked on carrying out this research, I had a much more simpler understanding of the relations between media and gender culture. Throughout this research, during the literature review phase and especially the data gathering phase, I started to see a different, more complicated picture. Despite the fact that I was already familiar with the culture and aware of the sensitivities around gender and media in Iraq, I underestimated the sophistication and the resilience of cultural norms.

How, gender relations are interwoven with many other cultural dynamics that makes it almost impossible to draw a clear line between them. How, gender is part of the wider culture; the tribalism, religion, morality, honour, reputation, the power-relations, and so on

and so forth and that media is made sense of in this multi-dimensional, multi-layered and multi-pronged environment.

As I will show in the next chapter, for the reason mentioned above, and many others, women in Iraq are part of this equation therefore, are not necessarily keen to change many aspects of their cultural norms, rendering the simple unilateral ‘media effects’ explanations even less convincing.

The next chapter will show how the local reality of Iraqi women’s lives limits their ability to use media as a way of breaking away from the restrictions that limit their movements. It will also be shown how Iraqis are reacting to this threat to their identity posed by Western/Westernised media. We will see that in the absence of any state policies, Iraqi men reassert their identity by enacting their *ird* within a media related environment, but also how women reject what they see as Western values.

## Chapter 7: Media and the Gendered Politics of Domestic Life

### 7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter demonstrated that although Iraqi people are happy to adopt media technologies, they have great concerns about the influence of some of the content available through media on their traditional gender culture, which they consider to be an important element of their identity. They are also worried that the media facilitates activities for women that are against this traditional gender culture. This chapter will investigate how these concerns, shape media use and consumption. As media consumption and use mainly take place at home, the focus will be on the politics of domestic life and media in Iraq. Media's ability to 'blur' the boundaries between the public sphere and the private sphere of homes is problematic. It will be shown how patriarchal gender relations give men the tools to try and limit their female kin's access to the media to prevent the interference of images and ideas that are seen as being only suitable for men from entering the private and 'pure' space of Iraqi homes; in order to avoid the 'negative influence' of the media on women's sexual attitudes and demeanour. The main action taken is to attempt to domesticate the media and adapt it to the local gender culture, however, it will be shown that these measures are not necessarily successful, and this leads to conflict within families. Violence is used to protect *ird* in cases of media use and consumption that is considered to be in violation of *ird*, but persuasion is also a strategy used to dissuade women from 'harmful' media consumption and use. This persuasion strategy relies on what are seen as Iraq's traditional values, which are vital elements in Iraqi identity.

## **7.2 Mitigating the Negative Influence of the Media**

The interviewees clearly agreed that while in this day and age it is not possible to discard the media, there should be measures put in place to mitigate what they see as the negative influence of media on their gender culture. When Kareem [working in a print shop, M, Y, B] raises his grave concerns about the influence of media on women's sexual demeanour, I ask him: 'are you in favour of censorship, like in the times of Saddam?'. He replied "No! Not like Saddam's times. You cannot ban these technologies altogether. We benefit from them in many aspects. But we need to control them in a way that removes the negative impact". Hoshyar [university lecturer in sociology, M, O, E] is in favour of a state censorship system to mitigate the negative impact on gender culture. He is not in favour of a total ban, such as the system that was implemented under Saddam, but certainly is in favour of a state censorship system. "Surely the government should do something about it. I'm also in favour of familial surveillance, but an Iranian style system run by the government is what it should be". Riham [member of the Sadr district council and the head of the committee for women and family, F, M.A, B] is in agreement with Hoshyar: "we don't have a proper government. It's chaos; otherwise they should have put in place measures to filter these vulgar shows".

The absence of government intervention does not, however, mean that Iraqis stay passive about an issue they think is so important to their identity as a people. They are taking action in order to adapt the media to their local culture. These measures will be explained later on, after first focusing on the patriarchal gender culture and media consumption in Iraq.

## **7.3 Iraqi Gender Culture and Media**

As explained in Chapter Four, Iraq is a deeply patriarchal society. Evidence presented by the interviewees confirms this statement in numerous ways. Patriarchy is manifest in popular discourses, not latent. *Ird*, as an effective hegemonic masculine system is key to sustaining

Iraqi patriarchy, rendering sexuality the main site of patriarchy. Gender relations and concepts such as *ird* and *ghira* have largely developed around the traditional patriarchal family, which plays a crucial role in the political, social and economic organisations of the country. The traditional patriarchal Iraqi family can be arranged in a variety of forms, based on class, economic status, tribal ties, geographical location, religion, and so on. These factors often determine the power relations within the household, proving the fluidity and flexibility of patriarchal structures. It is widely accepted that men are the head of the family and that they can exercise exclusive powers. In this patriarchal system, in some communities and families, men can decide on almost every aspect of their female kin's life without necessarily considering their own views, resulting in a greatly diminished self-determination. Sadiya [housewife, F, Y, B] talks clearly about her limited self-determination:

No one considers women whatsoever. For example, if she gets upset because of something, no one cares. I wanted to pursue my studies after secondary school; first my family prevented me and now it's impossible that my husband will allow me to go to college or university.

Raja [housewife, F, Y, B] is in agreement with Sadiya:

Men always oppress women. I think that women are oppressed in many ways. Their views are not heard at home... thank God we don't have these problems at home; my husband and I have a very good relationship, but he doesn't let me go out alone at all. The other day, I was cooking at home; I realised that we didn't have onions, so I called him to ask if I could go to the local shop to buy some. He said no, impossible. The

shop is a five-minute walk from our home, but he insisted I couldn't go. I told him how can I cook then? He told me to get some onions from the neighbours.

Not only did the female interviewees state that in Iraq men dominate women; the male interviewees also believe that women are oppressed in Iraq. Hussein [PhD candidate in arts, M, Y, B] was clear about this oppression:

In some communities in Iraq women are sometimes viewed as immature. Men look down on women and don't give them their rights to choose their profession, their husband. I mean fathers and brothers force husbands upon women. To be honest women are oppressed in some communities.

A story narrated by Salih [Shia cleric, M, M.A, B] clearly shows how women's lives in Iraq can be dominated and controlled by their male kin. Salih works in the office of an Ayatollah in Baghdad. He says that people come to their office to get help and advice about their problems. One day a man came to talk about his sister's problem:

His sister married one of her relatives and after she had an altercation with her husband, returned to her father's home. The husband said that her family should bring her back and apologise to him. Her father on the other hand, said that the husband should come and take her and apologise. This problem continued for 15 years. The husband is not willing to divorce her and during this time he remarried and now has children. And the father is not willing to refer his daughter's case to a religious office or the state court. Her brother was worried that the father might realise that he had come to our office to try and solve the problem. He thought that the father would be mad at him, saying how



dare he do this without the husband's apology. The woman's life is ruined and she is powerless.

This case clearly shows how men can be powerful in a patriarchal family. Two patriarchs, the father and the husband, have the power to determine their family members' fates, especially the female ones. This is possible due to the structure of the Iraqi patriarchal family.

Patriarchy privileges males and elders (including elder women in the Arab-Islamic world) and justifies this privilege in kinship terms. Females are generally taught to respect and defer to their fathers, brothers, grandparents, uncles, and, at times, male cousins. Young people are taught to respect and defer to their older kin (Joseph and Slyomovics 2001: 2).

### **7.3.1 Gendered Media Consumption in Iraq**

One of the matters that the male participants tend to determine for their female kin is how and to what extent they can have access to the media; this is also clear from the female participants' experiences as they described how their male kin limit and monitor their access to the media. As explained before, media consumption and use can encourage women to choose to have an alternative attitude towards their sexuality. It can also facilitate women bypassing the boundaries set and implemented by men. As a result, the male interviewees reported that in their domestic environment they take action to mitigate the 'harm' by curbing women's access to the media, as will be shown below. Structures of power and authority are particularly important in explaining media consumption in domestic environments. Media consumption and viewing decisions are processes that are negotiated at home on a daily basis, with gender relations at the heart of them. "The relationship

between the viewer and television, the reader and text, is often a relationship which has to be negotiated, struggled for, won or lost, in the dynamic and often chaotic processes of family life” (Gray 2013: 503). It is important to remember that studying domestic environments is not possible in exclusion of the wider social milieu. One always needs to consider the socio-political and economic developments that have led to the formation of the home in modern times, as well as the wider social norms that, to a certain extent, shape the domestic environment. This is an acknowledgment that “[the] home, what it is, what it means, and how it is experienced, does not just happen, or get structurally determined, but is the product of negotiations by people who operate within certain constraints” (Mason 1989: 104, cited in Silverstone 2003: 29).

In the modern world, homes are widely identified with privacy. Prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in Europe, houses were occupied by a variety of groups, and “the home had not necessarily been the exclusive terrain of a single family but often contained a mixture of biologically related persons, friends, associates and work partners. Work, recreation and the care of sick people all overlapped and co-existed within the same space” (Morley 2003: 22). The bourgeoisie that rose in the early nineteenth century, however, “was able to create and display a private world, separate from the world of affairs; a world in which personal pleasures and social preoccupations could be sustained and protected, shielded from the attentions of the public” (Silverstone 2003: 24). For the first time, the space for work was separated from living spaces. The domestic environment became a private space and the notion of control became an essential part of it.

In Iraq, a mixture of these types of homes can be observed, depending on geography, culture and class, but for urban middle class families in Iraq, the idea of the home as a private space, a place to resort to away from the ‘noise’ of the world, is the dominant idea. This is a place where economic activities are largely excluded and leisure is an important element of

it. The distinction between public and private is key to this type of home. The privatised nature of these homes allows the *ird*-based sex segregation between non-*mahrams*, hence women are not obliged to wear hijab at home, unless a non-*mahram* is present. The privacy of Iraqi homes that suitably accommodates *ird*-related codes is perceived to be under threat from the ‘intrusion’ of the media. Through the media, the public sphere, which is mainly a male one, enters the private sphere of the home, and this may challenge the feelings of security and belonging that are usually associated with home. As the interviewees indicated, the media is “a crucial link to a shared or shareable world of community and nation” (Silverstone 2003: 29) and that is one of the reasons for Iraqis embracing the media. But, at the same time, ‘unacceptable’ images transmitted through the media are seen as threatening the local traditional cultural values. This calls for action, as homes are considered to be private environments that are supposed to be immune from the problems of the outside. Many sexual matters are believed to be masculine and belong to the public space dominated by men. Anything related to sex can enter this category. Jokes, swearwords, sexual desires, sexual ‘secrets’, knowledge about sex and so on and so forth. Women are expected to be oblivious to these matters. They belong to the masculine world. One of the goals of keeping the public space dominated by males is to hide these matters from the private space that is shared by women. But “communications technologies inevitably transgress the boundaries of the household” (Morley 2003: 101), of the private space, bringing in materials that supposedly belong to men and making them available to women too. In the West, this transgression in the form of unwanted images is mainly considered to be threatening to children. Parents in the West are worried about the internet and “deregulated satellite television broadcasting bringing pornographic or violent programming within their children’s grasp. Deregulation is ...a question of fear of the family’s boundaries being transgressed directly by unwanted “foreign” elements (Morley 2003: 101). In Iraq, however,

the main concern is women's sexual corruption as a result of the intrusion of sexual content into the boundaries of private domestic environments. This seems to be due to the notion of the binary of what 'woman' is vs what 'man' is, and the fact that women are widely considered to be immature and gullible, as it is clear from common practices under *ird* that allow men to monitor women's movements in the fear that they fall into 'indecent'. They are seen as emotional and unable to make the right decisions, and as a result prone to the sexual vices. This emphasised femininity fits the masculine attribute of reason. Men are reasonable beings and that is why they are responsible for overseeing their female kin's behaviours, particularly those related to *ird*. This is the case even inside the domestic environment—a space that has historically been considered a feminine site. That is why men need to oversee the largely domestic activities of media consumption and use. Women are unable to protect themselves; they need men to protect them or they will fall victims of social ills, so the argument goes.

#### **7.4 Defining 'Woman' vs 'Man'**

As explained in Chapter Four, the notion of emphasised femininity is an important element in hegemonic masculine systems (Connell 1991). In these systems that help sustain patriarchy, the feminine is portrayed as feeble and emotional; the female is a being that needs to be protected by the strong, courageous and rational masculine. Amongst these masculine attributes, reason has a prominent position. Some of the interviewees gave what they call rationality a high standing and contrasted it with emotions that are considered less important, and sometimes seen in a negative light. On the other hand, rationality is associated with men, whereas emotions are linked to women. To Sheikh Laith [senior tribal chief, M, O, B], the superior standing of men in the realm of reasoning is clear: "Men are stronger both physically and mentally. We don't want to disrespect women, but it is impossible for women to be as

strong as men in terms of rational abilities”. This quality is exploited to give men the right to decide for the family, including the adult women. Sadiya [housewife, F, Y, B] believes that men are “entitled to more rights” because “they are better managers and bosses”. Successful management is usually linked to masculine rationality (Ross-Smith and Kornberger 2004). This dichotomy, however, is not special to Iraq. In other parts of the world, the female emotional versus masculine rational dichotomy has facilitated women’s subordination, as “the concept of reason, in its everyday sense, carries with it a claim of patriarchal power” (Najal-Docekal 1999: 50).

Historically, emotions have been considered as subversive to knowledge within Western philosophical traditions. They have been depicted as irrational impulses that overwhelm the body; while reason has been viewed as “the indispensable faculty for acquiring knowledge” (Jaggar 1989: 151). Traditionally, in Western culture, like nowadays in Iraq, reason has been categorised in a gendered manner, where it has been ascribed to men, while emotions have been associated with women. This means that women’s faculty of reason has been under question and that in general women have been granted an inferior position to men, since “the relationship between reason and emotion is represented as one of subordination” (Najal-Docekal 1999: 50). In search for the root of this dichotomy, Lloyd (1989) maintains that the Greek philosophers associated women and femininity with nature. Men came to be related with the opposite of nature, that is, reason and the mind. From here comes the association of rationality with masculinity (Ross-Smith and Kornberger 2004). As Ortner puts it, women’s association with nature “begins of course with the body and the natural procreative functions specific to women alone” (1972: 73). Three main reasons have contributed towards the spread of this dichotomy. First of all, women’s bodies are more involved with the ‘species’ life’. There are organs in women’s bodies that have no function in boosting their health; on the contrary, they are mainly sources of discomfort and pain.

Their main purpose is reproduction, which means that the “woman’s body seems to doom her to mere reproduction of life” (Ortner 1972: 75). However, this reproduction is repetitive and results in creating the same life in more individuals, while men, lacking the ability to create naturally, assert creativity in an external manner, ‘artificially’, through technology or symbols. In so doing, men create “relatively lasting, eternal, transcendent objects, while the woman creates only perishables—human beings” (ibid). Due to women’s greater bodily involvement with the natural functions related to procreation, they are viewed as being more a part of nature in comparison to men. On the other hand, women also participate in human social dialogue and culture. This quality renders them “something intermediate between culture and nature, lower on the scale of transcendence than man” (Ortner 1972: 76). Additionally, the physiological functions of women’s bodies, mainly functions related to child bearing and rearing, have tended to limit their social movements and have restricted them to social milieus that are viewed as being closer to nature, and consequently this has placed women in social roles seen as lower than the cultural functions of men. Finally, woman’s psyche is seen as being close to nature as well. Women’s traditional roles, which are imposed on them because of their physiological status, shape their psychic structure. As a consequence, like their physiological structure and social roles, their psyche is considered to be closer to nature (Ortner 1972). As a result, men have become associated with culture and women with nature. Nature is devalued in many cultures, giving women a pan-cultural second-class status. This is another manifestation of culture as a site for patriarchy.

Ascribing traits to men that are related to reason and culture, and giving women a lower rank by disconnecting them from mind and rationality and linking them to nature, has helped the hegemonic masculine system of *ird* to continue to function. As explained above, hegemonic masculinity is linked to an emphasised femininity, which stresses that women are emotional, instable, fragile, feeble and intellectually incompetent (Connell 1991). In Iraq

there is a fit between the hegemonic masculine system of *ird* and the concept of emphasised femininity. Hussein [PhD candidate in arts, M, Y, B] talks about women as subtle individuals: “woman is a beautiful and delicate being. Protecting her is beautiful too; she shouldn’t be turned to something vulgar”. These feminine characteristics make women in need of men’s protection; a protection that is provided by masculine, courageous, strong, competent and rational men who have *ghira* and are ready to defend their *ird*. On the basis of the dichotomy of emotional weak women vs. rational strong men, women are denied equality with men. When asked about women’s rights, Maysoon [journalist, F, Y, B] highlights emphasised femininity: “The main issue isn’t about rights or equality. I don’t believe in equality anyway. A woman is a woman; she needs to feel her femininity, because she is a female and there are things that men need to feel and the same is true for women”. The next comment shows that Maysoon is talking about women’s weakness vs. men’s strength: “Frankly I’m biased towards men. It’s not related to rights. It is related to the psychological formation of women. I mean men are able to do things that women cannot and this is part of their femininity. If she were able to do them, she would lose her femininity”. Maysoon intimates that women’s femininity entitles them to fewer rights, and that their femininity necessitates that they stay weaker than men. To Maysoon, women’s supposed incapability at doing some of the tasks that men are able to do, is part of women’s nature and is beneficial to them, as it gives them a feminine trait. This emphasised femininity persuades women that their weakness is part of their structure and men need to assume masculine roles, and that these supposedly superior roles give men more rights. One of these masculine roles is protecting *ird*, including by monitoring and restricting females’ media consumption. Kareem [working in a print shop, M, Y, B] clearly assumes the hegemonic masculine role of protecting his *ird* on the basis of the feminine trait of intellectual incompetence: “we [men] don’t let women watch these things. Women’s brains are small.

These [harmful shows] will corrupt them”. Zahra [shopkeeper, F, Y, B], refers to women’s intellectual capabilities by using a similar expression used by Kareem: “women’s brains are tiny. They can easily be lured on the internet by men who wants to use them only for sex”.

Another aspect of emphasised femininity is the female’s physical inferiority to men. This physical weakness also gives men more rights. In this regard, Riham [member of the Sadr district council and the head of the committee for women and family, F, M.A, B] says: “Women are weak beings, so they cannot achieve all the rights. Because of their structure and body, women don’t have equal rights with men. Because they are not able to lift heavy things, for example, or work in construction”. Emphasised femininity manifested in female’s inferior physical, as well as mental capabilities, persuades women that they need competent men to protect them. Women’s reputations linked to sexual honour is among the most important attributes that need protection by men outside the domestic environment, but equally inside it, especially due to what is perceived as the media’s intrusion into the private space of the home.

Historically, in popular culture, ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are defined in a binary. Man’s body and mind is attributed superior traits, giving him the ‘right’ to dominate women. The narrative of ‘lack’—women always lack something that men have, not the other way round, helps justify this ‘right’. In this argument the ability to grow children in the womb, or to feed children at the breast (to name two embodied examples of difference), are not normally brought forward as arguments for women’s physical and psychological strength. This was the case amongst the participants (both male and female). This is a manifestation of the blurred lines of biology and culture. It is clear that the participants provided a cultural narrative of what they see as clear, immutable and inevitable biological traits as the attributes that make ‘man’ and woman’. In this cultural view, the ‘superior’ biological traits that men possess make them eligible to decide for women.



As explained earlier, the interviewees viewed media as presenting opportunities and encouraging behaviours that are not acceptable according to the traditional cultural values of the society. The widespread consumption of media is proof that Iraqi men have accepted that it is not really feasible to fight the proliferation of media in the modern world. Therefore, they resort to a variety of mechanisms to shape media consumption, particularly by women, in a way that is compatible with the traditional cultural values of their society. They do so to neutralise this threat, or at least to mitigate the consequences and minimise the damage. There are always facilitating and constraining practices in the micro social environments of the family that alter media consumption at home. Since home does not exist in isolation of the wider society, one needs to consider the wider cultural concepts and practices of the society that shape media consumption. The wider cultural values of Iraqi society have a clear impact on the domestic environment. Although the domestic sphere is largely considered a female domain, to the male interviewees, *ird* related responsibilities determine that men, equipped with mental as well as physical superiority, have the ultimate control over what goes on in this domain. This notion is clearly summarised by Sheikh Laith [senior tribal chief, M, O, B]: “At the end of the day, a man needs to know what’s going on in his house. He knows what’s best for his family; he is the man of the family; he is the god of the family” [a common expression that refers mainly to the male head of households].

As explained previously, it is mainly men that are responsible for making sure *ird* and its pertinent codes are observed. Women are not trusted with their sexual desires. On the one hand, the sexual double standards prevalent in Iraq deny adult women sexual agency, particularly when these relationships happen outside marriage. The easiest and less costly way of protecting *ird* is to make sure that it is not violated in the first place. If *ird* is violated in any form, the reputation of the family, and especially the males, is severely damaged, and in order to regain *ird* some very difficult action has to be taken by men, including murder in

some cases (Dodd 1973). Veiling, sex segregation, and FGM are amongst these preventive measures that are practiced in one way or another in Iraq (UNICEF 2011; Khayyat 1990). Domestication of the media is another measure in this category.

As shown above, media is blurring the boundaries between the public and private. “A whole range of technological innovations have made the boundaries between the household and the outside world far more porous in both directions” (Morley 2003: 97). Media brings material that is considered as belonging to the mainly masculine public sphere into the private space of the home, where women are also exposed to it. In this regard, Isma’el [research assistant at University, M, Y, E] says: “there are sexual jokes and stuff that are not suitable for women. Stuff that you hear on the street, but for women to hear them, I think it’s obscene”. As the media is seen as a threat to the Iraqi gender culture, men need to make sure that women are ‘immunised’ against its negative impact. In order to achieve this goal, some pre-emptive action needs to be taken. To this end, men in Iraq try to ‘domesticate’ the media so that it is adapted to the gender-specific cultural norms and values of their society.

Domestication literally refers to taming a wild animal; however, metaphorically it refers to the situation whereby technology users try to bring it under control (Silverstone 2003) and ‘housetrain’ it, so that it is “integrated into the structures, daily routines and values of users and their environments” (Berker *et al.* 2006: 2). The process of domestication may start in the factory, where issues such as producing user-friendly products are taken into consideration. In this section, however, the focus is on the consumption phase, when men in Iraq try to control communication media by ‘housetraining’ and domesticating it at home to restrict their female kin’s access to some media content which they deem harmful. The capacity of men, as a social group appropriating media into the culture and the structure of everyday life in Iraq, will be discussed, with some light shed on the mechanisms used by men to domesticate media technology.

## **7.5 Domestication of Media in Iraq**

The male interviewees reported that they resort to a range of strategies in order to adapt media to Iraqi gender culture. This was corroborated by some of the female participants' personal experiences. Some of the interviewees maintained that women's access to the 'corrupting' content available on TV shows and the internet should be restricted, if not completely banned. This is one of the strategies advocated and applied by men in Iraq to 'tame' the media. This process of domestication is in line with what is seen as men's duty to protect their honour and that of their families, and it is proof that local circumstances can greatly shape media consumption and limit what is known as 'media impact'. This domestication is carried out through several mechanisms, as will be illustrated below.

### **7.5.1 Censorship**

Censorship is one of the mechanisms employed by men in Iraq to mitigate the 'negative impact' of media on their female kin. Kareem [working in a print shop, M, Y, B] believes in censorship as a mechanism for getting rid of Western media content that he deems harmful to women:

I believe if a man wants to allow a woman to watch satellite TV channels, he must block many channels. There are religious channels such as Al-Anwar or Kawthar; women can watch these channels. These are Islamic channels and teach women about religion. But women must not be allowed to watch channels that broadcast dance shows or Western TV. You know what kind of shows are on these channels.

Isma'el [research assistant at University, M, Y, E] will implement censorship after marriage: “When I get married, I will set codes for some channels, so that my wife wouldn't have access to bad channels. When it comes to the matter of dance shows and sex programmes, I'm conservative”.

### **7.5.2 Monitoring**

Censorship is not the only strategy some of the male interviewees have figured out to take control of the media. Monitoring women's access to the media is considered a way of making sure that women do not consume 'harmful' media materials. Ibrahim [high school student, M, Y, B] believes that “when women browse the internet, a man must sit next to them [to monitor what kind of activities they are doing when connected to the Internet]. Sheikh Haidar [junior tribal chief, M, M.A, B] believes that men are responsible for monitoring their female kin's media consumption: “there is a man in each home. He is the person who controls these matters. He must monitor his daughters, his sisters, etc. and see which channels are on”. When asked about his opinion on women's unrestricted access to media, he is surprised that such a thing exists: “A woman sits in a room by herself watching foreign dramas? I don't agree with this. Why? Isn't there any man standing over this girl who is alone in the room? Every house has a ruler, a patron. The problem with these households lies in their patron”.

### **7.5.3 Banning**

Some men go even further than that; they completely deny their female kin any access to certain forms of media. Kareem [working in a print shop, M, Y, B] believes that “men shouldn't allow women to have access to the Internet”. Sadiya's [housewife, F, Y, B] husband has actually denied her access to the internet, despite her continuous requests: “I have been asking my husband to connect me to the internet and he has always refused. He

says that he will buy me a laptop, but won't connect it to the internet. Even with the laptop, I wouldn't be allowed to use it more than a specific amount of time".

On the other hand, as the concerns about the negative influence of the media on sexual moralities in society is reflective of a prevalent sexual double standard in Iraq, so is the gender-based domestication of media that allows men to have much more freedom to explore their sexuality in the way they see fit. As a result, men have more options to use media technology in their everyday lives. Sheikh Laith [senior tribal chief, M, O, B] has denied his daughters access to the internet while allowing his sons the liberty of accessing the media: "We have a computer that is connected to the internet. I have two sons, they use the internet regularly, but my daughters never even enter the room where the computer is located". He does not show any concern about the possibility of his son's exposure to sexual content or the fact that they might use it to contact non-*mahram* women, while denying his daughters any type of access to the internet, in the fear that they might engage in some sexual activities that violate *ird*.

## **7.6 Female Resistance to Domestication of the Media**

As shown above, men implement a variety of methods to try to domesticate media in a way that restricts their female kin's access to media content that is seen as encouraging them to violate *ird*. However, the privatised and ubiquitous nature of media technologies make this mission a difficult, if not impossible, one. The interviewees made it clear that in many cases these strategies simply do not work, and at the end of the day, many women resist these restrictions and find a way of accessing the media content that their male kin do not want them to watch. Kareem [working in a print shop, M, Y, B], though very keen on domesticating the media, is under no illusion that in many cases it has not been successful: "I know a girl, a young student. She told me: in front of my dad I watch religious channels,

but when dad goes out, I watch music and dance shows and I have learnt all types of dance”. Layla [clerk in a hospital, F, Y, B] talks about how her friend connects to the internet without her husband’s permission: “I have a friend whose husband doesn’t agree to give her the password to the Wi-Fi at home. Instead, when he is at work she connects her laptop to their neighbour’s Wi-Fi, which doesn’t have a password”. Shahad [university lecturer at the college of art, F, Y, B] clearly believes that the domestication of media in Iraq does not work:

How can you control media access nowadays? Imagine everybody can buy an internet card and connect their mobile phone to the net. Yes, it is a little expensive for us Iraqis, but nonetheless, possible. And through that you can watch TV; you can see pictures, you can talk to other people. I don’t think it’s possible anymore to restrict access to the media. I mean, unless you ban it altogether, like during Saddam, and that is highly unlikely.

As is clear from the above remarks, the participants reported that there is resistance from many women in Iraq, regarding the restrictions that have been put in place by their male family members. This is indicative of the fact that the domestication mechanisms, are not necessarily successful in restricting women’s access to the media; many factors, including the increasing “fragmentation of domestic viewing” (Morley 2003: 90), allows many women to circumvent them, as media technologies are becoming more and more ‘privatised’ and mobile. This fact, however, creates conflict inside Iraqi families. This is especially true when considering the increasing tendency to obtain more than one TV set and satellite receiver, and also the nature of the internet, which allows ‘privatised’ usage to the point that one can be connected to the internet even inside her/his bedroom using a tablet or a smartphone.

## **7.7 Media Consumption and Domestic Conflict**

Media is seen as a major source of conflict inside Iraqi families. As will be shown below, there are three clear reasons why women's media consumption is a source of conflict within families. The main one is consumption of and/or exposure to the sexual content and also using media to engage in 'inappropriate' sexual contact, both viewed as being against the gender culture. It has been explained in detail how this is a sensitive issue that concerns many Iraqis, mainly men. The other reason is because media consumption and use is seen as a distraction from women's domestic duties. Also, women's exposure to media content that encourages women's agency is problematic.

In a patriarchal society, men try to sustain their dominance in a variety of forms. It is clear that in Iraq they believe that this domination is under serious threat from female media consumption and use. As a result, they try to curb women's access to the media, as was explained in the previous chapter. However, it is clear that a significant number of women in Iraq are resisting this strategy, hence the (at least) partial failure of domestication. When women continue media consumption and use it in a way that is seen as being inappropriate by men, conflicts arise. This is clear from the numerous media reports, some of which ascribe the increase in the numbers of divorces in Iraq to the media, and in particular foreign dramas and social media (Mahdi 2015). Others report that the internet encourages marital infidelity in Iraq (Al-Nahar). But this is not limited to the media; a report published by the Federal Judicial Authority in Iraq states that social media is behind the increase in the numbers of divorce cases in Iraq (Al-Fatlawi 2015). These reports are supported by anecdotal evidence such as the interviews carried out for the purpose of this research. Almost all of the interviewees mentioned media consumption as a source of conflict in Iraqi families. Tribal chiefs and clerics have a role in mediating between people in Iraq. As mentioned in Chapter

Two, tribal customary courts are one of the main references people rely on to resolve their disputes. These leaders, who bear the traditional authority, emphasise that many cases of conflict have occurred as a result of media consumption by women, and have been referred to them. In this regard Sheikh Laith [senior tribal chief, M, O, B] stated:

As a Sheikh I offer mediation for various conflicts on a daily basis. There are a lot of conflicts that happen because of the foreign dramas. Men don't want their wives to watch them; people in these dramas can be role models for their daughters and they [men] don't accept it. Or women see things in these shows such as dresses and stuff and the husband cannot afford them so problems start.

Omar [Sunni cleric, M, M.A, B] also talked about people referring to him for similar problems:

You know people of the neighbourhood trust us in the mosque. They refer to us to solve their problems. So, we see and hear many things. And satellite TV and the internet are causing a lot of problems inside families, mainly because of women using them in a way that our society cannot accept.

This theme is even reported by government officials. Abdelrahman [Head of the department for monitoring violence against women, M, Y, E], also mentioned media consumption and use by females as a major source of conflict inside families: "We witness a lot of problems here in Erbil that are created by satellite TV and the internet. Women imitate what they see on the TV or contact men through the internet, and this is a seed for conflict and violence".



He continues: “Many men in Kurdistan don’t like their wives to watch these shows. You see Turkish soap operas, they show marital infidelity and women learn from this. Men don’t want this to happen and this is definitely a source of conflict that we witness in our department”. Nouri [Journalist, M, O, B] also sees women’s media consumption as a reason for conflict in families:

We see so many conflicts over foreign dramas. There are men who don’t want their wives to watch these shows. Our society doesn’t accept this, because this will lead to deviation. Therefore, men prevent their wives from watching, and when women don’t listen to their husbands and continue watching these shows, naturally, problems occur.

The other reason media consumption is a cause of conflict inside families is that it interrupts what is seen as female’s domestic duties. Aqila [school teacher, F, M.A, B] believes that watching TV can be problematic for this reason: “Many men, when they come home and see their wives watching TV and not preparing food for them, will get angry. He comes home, and says: where is dinner? She replies: just let me watch this, let me finish it; and they start to quarrel over that”. Riham [member of the Sadr district council and the head of the committee for women and family, F, M.A, B] has experienced this first hand:

I was on my laptop at home, browsing the net, sending emails and stuff related to my work. So my husband saw me on the computer, and I was busy so forgot about him. He said: aren’t you going to prepare tea for me? I told him: ok, ok, just a minute and returned to my work. This happened several times and finally he burst out with anger.

In a society where the sexual division of labour is limited, domestic duties are mainly the responsibility of women. “The family is conventionally considered to be central to women’s lives and to the determination of gender inequality” (Walby 1997: 61). The importance of the household as a private patriarchal site of production is declining in many modern societies around the world. However, in a society that is still greatly shaped by tradition, and which experiences limited sexual division of labour, the household is a prominent patriarchal site where women, even women who work in paid jobs outside the household, are considered solely responsible for domestic duties. Zakiya [teacher, F, M.A, E] had a very telling story in this regard:

My husband doesn’t like the bread that is sold in bakeries. He wants me to bake him fresh home-baked bread. The other day I baked a lot of bread for hours and had a nasty backache because of that. I entered the kitchen to rest. All the chairs were taken by my husband and children; I said: would one of you move so that I can sit and rest for a while? I have a backache. They all said: no, we are hungry. First prepare the food, and then take a rest.

On the other hand, satellite TV programmes encourage women’s agency; an agency that is greatly denied according to the system of *ird*. TV programmes that focus on women’s issues are particularly important in this regard. Although, as Sakr explains, some of these shows are not more than “‘chatfest’ among a group of... women of different ages” (2007: 105), some others cover important issues that concern women in the Arab world. Narmeen [social researcher working in the Baghdad Women Association, F, M.A, B] talked about the role of these types of programmes:

There are TV programmes that have increased women's awareness of their rights. On MBC and on Alhurra TV, these programmes, which are specifically for women, give power to women to ask for their rights. For example, when we first launched this centre no one was speaking; for example, when there were cases of rape etc., everyone was silent. Now they come forward. These TV programmes give them strength.

Riham [member of the Sadr district council and the head of the committee for women and family, F, M.A, B], also sees these programmes to be very influential in raising awareness and encouraging women to increase their autonomy:

Some channels encourage women to enter new fields, to do new things. For example, encouraging them not to be satisfied with being a school teacher. Some of my friends are teachers, and as a member of the council since 2004, I was able to engage them. I asked to create committees that engage with communities. My friends were isolated. They would only go to school and think about teaching. I helped them register on some workshops; they quite liked it. Now they ask me when the time for nominations is. They watch TV. They see what other women have achieved. There are many activities presented on these channels. For example, the weekly magazine produced by the provincial council. They see these activities and it encourages them to enter different fields. They no longer confine themselves only to their jobs.

In addition to programmes that cover women's issues, dramas are also seen as encouraging women's agency and autonomy. Sadiya [housewife, F, Y, B] said: "Of course, when [Iraqi] women see how women in dramas are independent and strong they admire them; they want to gain this strength and learn from them". When I asked her if she wants to have a similar

life, she answered: “Sure, I like my life to be like them, in all aspects. The freedom they enjoy; the autonomy they have. In terms of studies, dress code, everything. Their lives are better than Iraqi women’s from all perspectives”. As explained before, the media allows viewers to compare their own local conditions with those common in other parts of the world. Through this process, they can distance themselves from their own conditions that they find unsatisfying (Thompson, 2001). This explains what the interviewees describe as ‘imitation. It is clear that many Iraqi women like Sadiya, have a desire to change their local conditions into the conditions diffused through the media, therefore they try to imitate what they see in an act of distancing themselves from their local reality. However, their ‘horizon of action’ is limited, since the local conditions are not going to disappear and allow women to disregard the traditional patriarchal structures altogether. The patriarchal systems make sure that the power relations are in favour of men, making it difficult for women to change this balance. This was completely acknowledged by Sadiya when she completed her last comment by saying: “But this is not going to happen in Iraq. Our traditions do not allow us to be like them. Men wouldn’t allow girls to become like that. I know girls who tried to be like that, tried to imitate what they see on the TV, but it brought them problems with their fathers and husbands”. Sheikh Laith [senior tribal chief, M, O, B] believes that as a result of women’s access to the media they are no longer obedient: “After [the introduction of] these technologies, some daughters rebelled against their fathers, some wives rebelled against their husbands. This is against our Islamic and tribal values and forces men to react. This is creating tensions amongst people”. Thus, it is believed that women can gain autonomy as a result of their access to the media. Men think they are losing control of their women, who are believed to be disobedient, and consequently react in a way that causes tension between men and women.

So far, three reasons why women's access to media cause conflicts in domestic environments have been explained. However, women's access to media is not the only source of media-related conflict between men and women in Iraq. Men's media consumption and use can cause problems too. It was reported by several informants that men compare their wives with the actresses they see on TV and as a result see the women on TV as more sexually desirable. Ibrahim [high school student, M, Y, B] has never had an encounter with a Western woman. He admits that he has only seen them on TV. Although Ibrahim strongly believes that Western media content is harmful for society and particularly corrupting for women, he revealed his favouritism towards Western women: "I don't like women here anymore. I like women in the West". When I reminded him that he said Iraqi women shouldn't follow the same path as Western women, he answered: "that's correct. But now I'm talking about men. Nowadays men prefer Western women". The media allows men to compare their own local conditions with other parts of the world too. These processes of media appropriation allow men to distance themselves from Iraqi women, and to desire 'sexier' women that are perceived to be mainly Western or Westernised. Riham [member of the Sadr district council and the head of the committee for women and family, F, M.A, B] firmly believes that men's favouritism towards the women they see on TV is a reason behind many conflicts at home:

The man switches different channels and sees the difference between the two [women appear on TV and his own wife]. Of course this will cause tensions at home. Many women have been to our office and talked about this problem. This actually happened to my sister. Her husband was watching TV in which these beautiful women with nice dresses appear, so his wife passed in front of him, and he immediately started saying: look at the difference between you and this [actress], leave me, you disturbed my thoughts [dreams]. And this will become the seed for further problems.

This shows that while media might provide women in Iraq with a limited ‘horizon of action’ through which they challenge *ird*-based norms and are able to regain some sexual agency and self-determination, its sexualised content can at the same time impose a different type of patriarchy in which the sexualisation of women is another basis for imbalanced power relations.

Needless to say, women do not possess a sophisticated system such as *ird*, to try and alter their male kin’s access to media; another testament to the sexual double standard that is prevalent in Iraq. Men, however, can take different actions based on *ird*. For example, when domestication fails, it may result in violent action being taken by men against their female kin.

### **7.7.1 Female Media Use and Domestic Violence**

Although hegemonic masculinity mainly consolidates men’s domination over women “through culture, institutions, and persuasion” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832), it does not completely rule out brute force in order to sustain patriarchy. In Chapter Four, it was explained that violence is an important site of patriarchy that helps the other site of patriarchy in Iraq, that is, sexuality, to function in a more efficient manner. *Ird* relies on a variety of strategies (including persuasion) to sustain patriarchy; this however does not mean that Iraqi men never use violence to impose *ird* codes such as restricting their female kin’s access to media. In fact, their *ghira* dictates that when they feel that their sexual honour of *ird* is under threat or violated, they can take action by employing violence, either to prevent the violation or *ird*, or to regain it after it was violated (Dodd 1973; Abu-Rabia 2011). There is always an environment of threat hanging over women’s heads in Iraq, reminding them that if they deviate from *ird*’s codes of practice, they may be severely punished. Zahra’s

[shopkeeper, F, Y, B] take on this is an important indicator of this continuous threat:

Turkish dramas are a catastrophe. They show women as free, independent beings that can have boyfriends etc. This encourages our women to follow them and try to be like them. This is crazy, our society is different; you know how many women are killed because of such behaviours in Iraq?

For Zahra, *ird*-based violence is a continuous threat and a deterrent against transgression of *ird*. The constant fear of honour-based violence in societies that value *ird* has been widely reported. King (2008: 322), who has carried out ethnographic research in Iraqi Kurdistan, makes the following observation: “Within the context of this restrictive way of life for girls and women lurked the spectre of honor killings. Most of my female interlocutors who were of childbearing age (but not those younger or older) seemed to live in constant fear of them”. Not only threats of violence, but also the use of actual violence is prevalent in Iraq, when it comes to enforcing *ird* codes. Although obtaining reliable statistics about honour-based violence in Iraq is difficult, numerous reports warn of a dire situation and Human Rights Organisations have called for action to protect women against it (see Green and Ward, 2009; Human rights Watch 2011; Bayoumy and Kami 2012). There are numerous stories of *ird*-related violence that happened due to women’s media consumption in the interviews. Omar [Sunni cleric, M, M.A, B] narrated a story about a man who caught his daughter having cyber-sex:

There’s a family in our neighbourhood. The daughter would go in her room and stay there for hours. After a while the father was suspicious, so he asked the mother what she is doing staying awake in her room till late. She told him that the daughter is

studying. After a while he was more suspicious, so he entered her room without her noticing and saw her daughter chatting with a half-naked man. He denied her food for days until she fainted and they had to call a nurse to come to their place to save her.

When *ird* is violated to a degree, violence is used to teach a lesson that prevents the future ultimate violation of *ird*, that is, penetration and pregnancy by a non-husband man. Kareem [working in a print shop, M, Y, B] narrated an *ird*-related murder: “A row happened between a couple. The woman who was offended by the way her husband talked to her angrily said ‘you talk to me as if I sleep with Mohannad<sup>34</sup>. The husband shot his own wife dead.” When I asked Kareem if he believed that the husband had the right to kill his wife, he replied, “Of course he had. She fancied a man on TV who lives hundreds of miles away from her. What would have happened if a handsome man lived around the corner?” As mentioned in Chapter Four, 68% of young Iraqi men justify killing women for violating *ird*, by sleeping with non-husband men (Human Rights Council, 2014). Another *ird*-related act of violence that was reported by Omar [Sunni cleric, M, M.A, B] shows clearly the extent to which *ird* is a public matter, and that if the violation of *ird* is known to the public, the punishment inflicted on the female is more severe:

A girl took the school shuttle with her friends. She got off in front of the school’s gate, but didn’t go in, so they registered her absent. Her classmates said that they saw her on the shuttle and that she was with them. The head teacher contacted her family. Her father is an army General. So he provided her with everything, the internet connection, and the best mobile phones available. They thought the girl had been abducted [high ranking army personnel and their families are targeted by the insurgency in Iraq]. So,

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<sup>34</sup> A Turkish actor.



he called the police. When the school time was over, she came back to the school to take the shuttle back home. Everybody was there, the parents, school staff, and the police. He beat her up severely in front of them in a way that she was hospitalised. It turned out that she found a boyfriend through Facebook and she went to see him. The father didn't let her go to school anymore.

Again, the media is implicated in an act of violation of *ird*. The *ird* related codes oblige men to take violent action against their own female kin in the event of violation of *ird*. They have to do so to regain their honour and reputation in society (Dodd, 1973). Not all men are prepared to take the ultimate action by killing the person who violated *ird*. Similar to other hegemonic masculine systems, where only a minority of exemplars live up to what is expected from the 'ideal' man, *ird* based killings are perpetrated by a minority of hegemonic masculine exemplars, and most men are not prepared to do that. In the above case, the father did not kill his daughter but beat her severely. This can be explained from different aspects. First of all, there are different levels of the violation of *ird* that deserve different levels of punishment. This might differ from family to family and community to community. For example, not wearing hijab might be viewed as the violation of *ird* in some communities, but in others it does not constitute a violation of *ird*. This shows that like any other social structure, Iraqi patriarchy and the system of *ird* are flexible and prone to change. However, as mentioned before, there is a common concept, which is that women need to dress modestly. Being in touch online in an intimate manner with a non-husband man can be another level of the violation of *ird*, and ideally, the female perpetrator needs to be punished, but it is not the ultimate violation. The ultimate violation of *ird*, which according to the collective ideal of the hegemonic masculine system of *ird* deserves the death punishment, is being penetrated and/or impregnated by a non-husband man. All other levels of violation of

*ird* should be stopped by persuasion, threat of violence or using violence short of murder or a combination of these three strategies, because they are viewed as leading to penetration and impregnation by a non-husband man. In the above case of the high school girl, there was no proof that penetration and/or impregnation had happened, although there was a possibility that it happened, as the girl was with the non-*mahram* man; this can generate rumours and severely damage the reputation of the family and especially the male members of that family, hence the severe beating. However, women might be killed in an *ird* related killing based on suspicion. “In a social milieu in which honor killings are practiced, to create or nurture suspicion about a girl or woman’s sexual transgression is to possibly endanger her life” (King 2008: 320). And in this case there is certainly room for suspicion. So, why did the father not kill his daughter based only on suspicion? This could be explained by the fact that he is not ready to act as a masculine exemplar and to conform to the collective ideals of the hegemonic masculine system of *ird*. As explained previously, most men are not ready to take action such as murder, although less severe violent actions such as battering are more common in cases of violation or *ird*. The fact that so many people became aware of this violation of *ird*, may have contributed to the severity of the battering, as *ird* is a matter of public awareness and reputation in the eyes of other people. On the other hand, men who benefit from the dividend of a patriarchal system, enforced and sustained by the system of *ird*, are complicit and allow the violence to happen. This explains why men, including the policemen who witnessed the man beating his daughter, did not stop him. In the case mentioned by Kareem [working in a print shop, M, Y, B] however, the husband was ready to take action, as expected from a masculine exemplar, and act on the suspicion that under the ‘right’ circumstances his wife would sleep with a ‘strange’ man.

Violence is normally the last resort for men to prevent violation of *ird* or regain it. Persuasion and threat of violence are normally used before the execution of violence itself.

*Ird* is not simply an oppressive system employed by men to subordinate women; a system that women are forced to live under against their will just because they are powerless. Codes that have been developed around *ird* and also values that promote and support *ird* constitute an important part of the value system and identity of the nation; an identity that is shared by women. That is why *ird* is such an effective system. The values that *ird* draw upon are perceived to be under threat from another value system, namely the Western one that is intruding through the media. As demonstrated in Chapter Six, *ird* is important for what is perceived as Iraqi identity, as it derives support from deeply respected cultural values. The next section will show how men exploit this to persuade women to abide by *ird*-related codes.

## **7.8 Persuasion**

Domestication, conflicts and violence are not the sole story around media consumption in Iraq. Iraqi men sometimes resort to another more lenient strategy to ‘mitigate’ the ‘negative influence’ of media on their female kin. In addition to domesticating media technologies to adapt them to cultural values, they may try to persuade women to refrain from watching material that is seen as against those values and particularly harmful to *ird*; mainly drawing upon traditional cultural values which constitute key elements in Iraqi women’s (as well as men’s) identity. Culture, as an important site of patriarchy, promotes values that help sustain men’s domination over women (Walby 1997). In Iraq, culture is deeply informed by the traditional institutions of tribe and religion. Men exploit these values to persuade women to abide by values promoted by concepts related to another site of patriarchy-sexuality. This process of persuasion normally takes place in a gentle manner and relies mainly on emphasised femininity. Talking about women’s access to media, Omar [Sunni cleric, M, M.A, B] stated that men need to be gentle with women in convincing them to restrict their

access to inappropriate media content: “men shouldn’t be dominant at home. With good words and treatment [they can convince women to avoid harmful materials]”. In line with Omar’s remarks, Hoshang [real estate agent, M, O, E], talking about the same issue said: “The god of the family should direct them [female kin] with good words”. As explained earlier, men are seen as wise and rational; traits that qualify them to advise and guide their family members, including female adults who are seen as impressionable, incompetent and gullible.

### **7.8.1 Female’s *Ird* as a Moral Value for Persuasion**

Women in Iraq might be persuaded to conform to codes of *ird* in different ways. First of all, women’s sexual demeanour is linked to their own reputation. Although *ird* is mainly a masculine quality, it can be attributed to women too. But unlike men’s sexual honour, which is linked to someone else’s sexual conduct, that is, their female kin, women’s *ird* is linked to their own sexual conduct and is mainly linked to their virtue rather than honour. In order to preserve their own *ird*, women are expected and persuaded to limit their sexual contact to those allowed under *ird*. Talking about women’s presence in the media, Salih [Shia cleric, M, M.A, B] touched upon this feminine aspect of *ird*: “Let women work in art, in media, in any field, provided that they preserve their *sharaf*” (another term that sometimes is used interchangeably with *ird*). Aqila [school teacher, F, M.A, B] is also concerned about women’s *ird* nowadays in Iraq:

People are forced to marry their daughters off these days at an early age. I’m going to do it myself to be honest with you. Although I’m a teacher and cultured, as soon as my daughter reaches 15, I’m going to marry her off. I won’t leave her [single] in this society. My daughter is clever at school and stuff, but I’m afraid for her. Our society

has become brutal. There are so many religious programmes on TV, but at the same time many boys and girls are doing the opposite [of what is preached in these religious shows]. Young people take drugs, ecstasy and alcohol; it's become very difficult for a girl to preserve her *ird*.

Aqila is worried about failing to bring her daughter up in a way that she, herself, restricts her sexual contact and preserves her *ird*. Therefore, she plans to marry her off at an early age, before she establishes a relationship that is considered illegitimate according to *ird*. If a woman fails to preserve her *ird*, she will lose her reputation and will be given a bad name. Raja [housewife, F, Y, B] believes that some of her friends have damaged their reputations because they have behaved in a way that is incompatible with societies' gender culture:

I have friends who always watch Western music shows. They've become like the Westerners. They wear jeans outside the home; they share their pictures on Facebook. They speak foreign languages, dance like foreigners, they've become like them. We cannot become like Westerners. We live in an Islamic and Eastern society. You see when a woman behaves like that in our society, people look at her in a negative way, for example they won't have suitors, because they are seen as indecent people.

The women she refers to have not adhered to the codes of modesty that are linked to *ird*, therefore they have damaged their reputations in the eyes of some people, and they might face consequences for their actions. Women such as Aqila [school teacher, F, M.A, B] and Raja [housewife, F, Y, B] are persuaded that it is in the female's benefit to comply with the moral values of *ird* and, therefore, they emphasise that women must refrain from watching media content that is not compatible with *ird*. In this regard, Raja says: "women should not

watch shows that are not good for them. If we don't do this, as mothers we will be showing the wrong way to our daughters. They will grow up believing that it is ok to behave like these women on these shows. We will damage their moral values.”

Codes of *ird* and values that support it are important part of the traditional cultural values of the society, including female members of society. Therefore, many women are convinced that transgression of *ird* is wrong. Women's sexual agency, and even promiscuous behaviours, undermines *ird*, as this system is based on controlling and limiting women's sexual attitudes. In addition, as *ird*-based sexuality is a moral matter, which is promoted by the Iraqi value system, women are not keen to undermine it. One of the strengths of hegemonic masculinity is that it takes its effectiveness from complicit men, and equally complicit women, who believe that hegemonic masculinity is a positive notion-a norm that is beneficial to women (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Indeed, 'cultural processes' are key to the functioning of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1991). These cultural processes convince women to abide by rules set by *ird*. With this in mind, men exploit traditional cultural values to implement the persuasion strategy. When talking about convincing women not to consume inappropriate media content, Omar [Sunni cleric, M, M.A, B] said: “Women are emotional; you can convince them by using a Quranic verse or an Islamic story about the prophet”. Omar exploits both emphasised femininity and cultural values to protect *ird*. Wise moral men can use the Islamic value system to persuade women to avoid the media content that is seen as encouraging sexual immorality. In many cases, they are successful because they draw upon cultural values widely respected by women.

## **7.9 Conclusion**

In a media environment where any kind of material is available, the Iraqi state agencies do not play any role in filtering this content, allowing those that are both compatible and

incompatible with local culture to be available. In this environment, Iraqis take the responsibility for adapting media to their culture. Gender culture is at the heart of this initiative, and men are the prime players. They are expected to protect *ird* from any 'danger', and that includes undesirable media content or services available through media technologies. As any media consumption and use happens inside the social milieu and is influenced by it, the 'horizon of action' for women to deviate from the influential and strict social rules is limited. In the case of women's media consumption and use in Iraq, the existing power relations that attribute to men traits that entitle them to control women's lives, means that men can curb women's access to media, so that they cannot deviate from the gender-related cultural norms. In this regard, they resort to domestication of the media, using strategies such as banning, monitoring and censorship. This strategy is not necessarily successful, and some women resist the domestication of the media. The increasing privatised nature of media consumption and use is key in their success at bypassing the boundaries set by their male family members. They have been able to use the media to claim their sexual agency by watching shows, which although men watch, they do not allow women to watch; in addition to using the media to establish sexual contacts. This causes conflict in Iraqi families. Men's honour is violated and they react to that, sometimes in a violent way. But women's access to sexual content is not the only problem, nor is their use of the media to find sexual contacts. Women's domestic duties are negatively influenced by media consumption and use. Many popular TV shows distract women from their duties at home and men do not like this. Additionally, some TV shows encourage women to be independent, to reclaim their agency and to know their rights-rights that are not necessarily in line with *ird*. The media is a window to a 'horizon of action' for women, enabling them to see other 'more liberal' societies and the way women in those societies are strong and independent. Although the local reality limits Iraqi women's ability to move towards materialising their

goals, it is a source of conflict. Furthermore, men's media consumption is also a problematic issue, as they are exposed to a mirage of sexualised images of women. They also distance themselves from their own reality in which their wives may be less attractive than the women portrayed in the media, and dream about having sexier partners. It seems, then, that women are here subject to a different kind of pressure—they are expected to work as housewives while being as attractive as actresses.

When the domestication of the media fails, and women use it in a way that is viewed as inappropriate, men may resort to physical violence. This can be either as a warning and the prevention of further transgression of *ird*, or as a way to regain it. Not all women need to be put off using media in an 'inappropriate' way. Iraqi patriarchy and the system of *ird* draw upon value systems that are shared by all Iraqis, and that includes religious values, as explained in Chapter Four. This Iraqi identity, shared by both men and women, is viewed as being under attack from Western sexualised media content; as a result, values that promote *ird* are seen as being under attack. Therefore, women are persuaded that they need to preserve their identity, that is, respect the values that shape *ird*. In this manner, women are complicit in their own domination facilitated by the system of *ird*. This explains the resilience of *ird* and also the limited role the media plays in transforming Iraqi patriarchy.



## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

### **8.1 Media and the Struggle over Identity**

Since its establishment at the hands of the British Empire in 1921, Iraq has witnessed a continuous struggle over its identity as a nation. For the most part, modern ideologies have clashed with traditional ones to form this identity. Gender has always been a central theme in this struggle. During the monarchy period (1921-1958), while the British were busy building modern institutions such as the army and parliament, they also felt compelled to give significant weight to traditional institutions, particularly the tribe. This policy, to a great extent, kept change away from gender culture, particularly in rural areas where the great majority of Iraqis lived, as traditional institutions supported a deeply patriarchal gender culture. Several 'progressive' republics, which were suspicious of traditional institutions and through modernisation programmes attempted to marginalise them, followed. Traditional gender culture was challenged, and for decades, women's participation in public spheres was encouraged, resulting in the increasing presence of women in education and lower positions in state institutions. The last decade of the previous century witnessed an embrace of the traditional institutions by the state, resulting in a regression in the achievements of the previous decades, and a resurgence of traditional gender culture. But it was in the post-Saddam era that the traditionalists found a space to fully participate in redefining Iraqi identity, and gender culture was strongly present on their agenda. The American-led invasion of 2003 opened the door for a struggle over the cultural identity of Iraq. After decades of the rule of a dictatorship, which through its 'cultural policies' tried to define the identity of the nation in a way that suited its agenda, space opened up for a variety of groups (international, regional and local) to participate in the 'redefinition' of this identity. Americans were keen to build a pro-American liberal democracy. The Iranians wanted Iraq to be a satellite of their

theocracy and an important player in an Islamic Shia bloc led by Iran. Internally, Islamists of different strands have had opposing ideas. Some Shia Islamists want an Iranian style system; others are happy just with a system that respects their Islamic values. The same can be said about some Sunni Islamists. Other Sunni Islamists, however, have a radically different idea about the identity of the nation. They do not see Iraq as a nation-state; rather, Iraq in their view is part of an Islamic empire-a caliphate. The major Kurdish groups diverge from most of the above. They want to see the breakdown of Iraq, as the birth of an independent Kurdistan is their desire. On the other hand, secular groups in Iraq, including some women's rights groups, want a secular identity for the country, where religion does not play a crucial role in the legal system and other state institutions. Other influential social groups, such as tribal figures, are striving to consolidate tribal culture in the country. In this chaotic situation, not only is the identity of the country in the political arena contested, but cultural identity is also a matter of struggle. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is a feeling amongst some sectors of society, from politicians to clerics and even 'ordinary people', that the local culture is under threat, a viewpoint shared by various sections in other Middle Eastern societies. This is a perspective that believes in a conspiracy organised by the West to transform and Westernise Muslim culture. According to this viewpoint, in this battle over identity, the media is the main weapon. Gender relations in particular are seen as the target of this media conspiracy. Mediated 'modern' ideologies that encourage sexual liberty and female agency are viewed as targeting Iraqi/Muslim family values; values that are seen as rooted in the traditional values of Iraqi society, and that are mainly shaped by the institutions of tribe and religion. To answer the question of media and gender in Iraq, it was essential to discuss the question of tradition and modernity in this country. This is especially important because the influential institutions of tribe and religion take the responsibility for promoting and preserving what they believe to be the traditions of society. Also, millions of

Iraqis respect and follow the leaders of these institutions on this basis. Hence, it has been important to ask the following question: How has tradition and modernity shaped Iraqi society? This research has demonstrated how traditional institutions influence Iraqi society. The religious institutions are extremely powerful, as it is obligatory for Muslims to follow religious leaders. This has enabled religious leaders to collect religious taxes, and this in turn has enabled them to build extensive institutions. Religious leaders are influential to the point that they can influence the processes of electing the Prime Minister, and they were able to recruit soldiers to fight the forces that attempted to topple the post-Saddam order. On the other hand, the tribal leaders are also able to exert huge power through customary courts that touch almost every aspect of social life in Iraq. Their role, as customary judges, is respected in a variety of conflicts stretching from family matters to blood feuds. In many cases they rival the state courts, even in heavily urban areas such as Baghdad. These traditional leaders' worldviews towards gender relations are particularly heeded to, and they promote a very clear gender culture in which the sexual demeanours of women are strictly controlled by their male kin. These powerful traditional institutions, however, are not the only powerful institutions in Iraq; modern state institutions are also important and play a key role in shaping social life in Iraq. This has created a hybrid status in which religious and tribal institutions work alongside, and sometimes rival various state institutions.

The next question is aimed at understanding the factors that shape gender relations in Iraq: What factors have shaped gender culture in Iraq since the overthrow of Saddam? This research has revealed that a variety of factors have shaped the deeply patriarchal gender culture in Iraq. Several sites in Iraq work hand in hand to sustain men's dominance over women. Sexuality is the most important site of patriarchy in Iraq. Almost every aspect of a female's life can be controlled by their male kin through enacting *ird*-based values that are aimed at limiting women's sexual agency. This is a hegemonically masculine system that

promotes a version of gender relations in which a man's reputation and honour is linked to his female kin's sexual demeanour. According to this system, men are supposed to make sure their female kin have only 'appropriate' sexual relations, that is, sexual relations only with their husband. Accordingly, men have to take pre-emptive measures to prevent the violation of *ird*. This can be done through a variety of measures that limit and monitor women's contact with non-*mahram* men. If the female kin establish any relations that are not compatible with *ird*-based norms and values, the honour of her male kin is violated, and men are supposed to take action, mainly through violence, sometimes even including murder. Any other type of masculinity that is not considered to limit and monitor a man's female kin's sexual behaviour and attitude is discredited and deemed immoral. Not all men are willing to resort to violence, and especially murder, to regain their honour. Only men who are willing to live up to the exemplars of *ird* commit this level of violence, but other men who are willing to be complicit in this power structure are also the beneficiaries of this patriarchal structure. Women also play a role due to being complicit, as they see *ird* as a value. This is especially true because *ird* draws its support from traditional values such as religious values, which are widely respected by Iraqis.

The cultural codes that are set around sexuality are particularly important in maintaining patriarchy. Therefore, culture is also an important site of patriarchy. What are considered to be the traditional values of society play a vital role in this structure, making traditional institutions and authorities important elements in Iraq's patriarchal gender culture. As explained above, although *ird* as a hegemonic masculine system relies mainly on persuasion and the complicity of men and women, it draws upon violence when it is deemed necessary, making violence another site of Iraqi patriarchy. In addition, state institutions support the norms and values around *ird* in a variety of ways. For example, the law in Iraq is lenient towards men who commit *ird*-based violence. People who are responsible for law

and order, such as the police and judges, are sympathetic to men who try to defend their *ird*. Therefore, the state is also a patriarchal site in Iraq.

However, the state has also attempted to ‘modernise’ gender culture in Iraq during different periods in the history of modern Iraq. Since the early days of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and particularly in the second half of that century, ideas about gender equality and women’s emancipation started to be heard in Iraq. Successive regimes in Iraq started to promote and implement policies that aimed at bringing gender equality, helping more women to become educated and participate in the public sphere. These policies challenged some important principles of traditional gender culture such as veiling and sex segregation. Although the political insatiability, war and harsh sanctions, as well as the increasing presence of Islamic groups in socio-political life, have striped women of some of these achievements, the role of modern ideas in Iraq’s gender culture cannot be ignored. Therefore, gender culture in Iraq is a reflection of the bigger picture of Iraq’s social life, where what is viewed by Iraqis as tradition exists, mainly in an uncomfortable and contentious manner, alongside modern ideologies about gender relations.

One of the vehicles that have introduced modern ideas around gender is the media. The 2003 invasion linked Iraq to the processes of globalisation of communications and, now, modern media is being embraced extensively in Iraq, with increasing numbers of people using it. But at the same time, the media is also seen as a threat to Iraqi cultural identity. The question of media consumption and use within Iraq’s patriarchal culture is one of the key questions in this research: How is media used and/or consumed in gendered domestic environments in Iraq? This research has demonstrated that media consumption and use is influenced by the existing gender relations. As the Iraqi gender culture gives men the right to determine what is suitable for women, men have the right to restrict women’s access to media as they see fit. Media has the capability of bringing ‘sexual’ material (seen as

belonging to the male dominated public sphere) into the private space of homes. The ‘sexual’ content and narratives that are presented by the media are seen as not being compatible with Iraqi cultural culture. They also view content that is available through the media as being Western, and compatible with the values of an alien culture. Whether they believe this is a Western conspiracy to subjugate Muslim people, or that they are simply cultural products of a radically different culture, the interviewees (both men and women) agreed that they are harmful to the cultural identity of Iraqi people. To their mind, the threat to their culture is also coming from technologies, such as the internet, which facilitate behaviours that are not in line with their culture. In fact, the introduction of the media post-2003 has provided opportunities for Iraqi women to challenge patriarchy. Since 2003, Iraqi women have been exposed to an increasing quantity of media content that is perceived as sexual, giving Iraqi women a different idea about their sexuality, other than the *ird* based one. Also, the internet is giving women the opportunity to gain sexual agency, as the internet allows women to bypass the boundaries of their male kin to find sexual partners. Additionally, the feminist ideologies that promote female agency and self-determination provide an alternative narrative for women in Iraq. These three aspects allow women to, at least partially, break away from *ird* based patriarchy. All these developments and activities, however, do not happen to the exclusion of other social structures. Although the media provides a window for people to compare their local lives with those in other societies and allows them, to some extent, to distance themselves from their own lives, as this thesis clearly shows, the realities of local life do not allow for ‘full-scale’ deviation from the structures of gender culture in their own society as a result of their exposure to radically different ideas about gender.

## **8.2 Mitigating Media’s ‘Harmful Effects’**

All in all, although the media is seen as being beneficial in a variety of ways, it is also viewed

as a force that needs to be harnessed, so that its negative effects can be mitigated. This intervention is supposed to make the media compatible with Iraqi gender culture. For years in Iraq and other countries in the region, state agencies have implemented plans to control the media. One of the main reasons for this approach is the states' fear of the media creating a public space that challenges the status quo. Furthermore, some of the regimes in the region, Iran the most obvious example, have been preoccupied with what they believe to be the cultural onslaught of the West, facilitated by the media. This 'cultural invasion's main objective is also perceived as being a political one. In post-Saddam Iraq, state agencies do not have any plans in this regard. There is no government censorship anywhere in Iraq when it comes to having access to media content; all types of media technology are also allowed to be acquired by citizens. In this thesis, it has been shown that in this environment, there are people who take the initiative themselves to protect themselves and their families from what they see as the harmful effects of the media. The interviewees' concern was mainly their *ird*-related values and codes when it comes to women's media access. As Iraqi men are the main protectors of *ird*, the interviewees widely agreed that in the case of mitigating the harmful effects of the media, men take the main responsibility, and they implement a variety of strategies to achieve this objective. These strategies are mainly implemented in the domestic environment. Media domestication is an important one in this regard. This domestication takes place at the level of media consumption and use. Amongst the *ird*-related domestication strategies is censorship. Through this strategy, men limit women's access to some media, for example, through setting up codes on the satellite channels receiver to make it impossible for their female kin to have access to those channels. Another way of domesticating the media to make it compatible with Iraqi gender culture is monitoring. Using this strategy, men monitor their female kin's media consumption and use, for example, by not allowing them to watch satellite TV alone or by sitting next to them

while they are connected to the internet. Banning access to some forms of media altogether can also be used to limit the ‘harmful influence’ of the media. Some of the interviewees believe that there is no need for women to have access to the internet. Some of the female participants reported that their male kin do not allow them to access the internet. These are pre-emptive measures taken by men to protect *ird*.

As this research has shown, another strategy used to protect Iraqi cultural values from the damaging Western media is persuasion. Hegemonic masculine systems rely on persuasion to continue. They do not necessarily use brute force to sustain patriarchy, as this would make the relationship between men and women untenable. Instead, hegemonic masculinity draws upon other resources such as culture to persuade women that this relationship is in their benefit. The hegemonic masculine system of *ird* also relies on very important cultural values and norms promoted by the religion of Islam, and also tribe, to persuade women of the benefits of the ascendancy of men over them and their rights to monitor and control their sexuality and other aspects of their lives. The participants reported that when men try to mitigate the harmful effects of the media, they draw upon these values to persuade women to self-limit their access to media, in the hope that they will stay immune from what they believe to be the evils of the media.

These strategies are, however, not always successful, and as a result, women’s access to media is sometimes viewed as violating *ird*. As the media’s nature is becoming increasingly ‘privatised’, it is becoming increasingly difficult for men to monitor their female’s kin media access, as they can find ways to avoid the restrictions on their media use and consumption. This research has demonstrated that the media is a source of conflict in some Iraqi families, and this result was widely acknowledged by the interviewees, as well as also other sectors of Iraqi society. The participants repeatedly talked about a radical transformation of gender culture and an increase in conflicts inside families as a result of



access to the media, which has manifested itself in rising divorce rates. This is also emphasised by numerous media reports in Iraq; for example, one Asharq Al-Awsat news report entitled ‘Social media behind the rise in divorce cases in Iraq’ reads: “There is an increase in the numbers of reported problems regarding couples as a result of the technological openness and the proliferation of social media” (Al-Obaidi 2015). One of the manifestations of these conflicts is resorting to violence. When the pre-emptive measures of domestication and persuasion fail, and *ird* is either violated or feared to be violated, violence is used to either prevent a further transgression of *ird* or to regain *ird*. The threat of violence works as an important deterrent to prevent women engaging in any behaviour that violates *ird*, and actual violence is also used in the case of transgression of *ird*. As mentioned previously, hegemonic masculinity relies mainly on persuasion, but if necessary, violence is used to make sure patriarchy is sustained. Violence is an important site of patriarchy and is also supported by culture and the state. Tribal and religious norms allow for the punishment of women who are in violation of *ird*. This violence can take the form of physical violence such as battering, and even murder. In these cases, the state agencies such as the legal system are often complicit.

As mentioned above, persuasion is an effective strategy for hegemonic masculinity such as *ird* to sustain patriarchy. In the case of Iraq, the fact that *ird* draws its legitimacy from what are seen as the traditional values of society, this makes the question of identity an important one; hence this research has addressed the following question: What role does cultural identity play in this process? Traditional values are weaved within Iraqi identity. This identity, which the interviewees believed to be under threat from the media, is to be protected from media content that is against these traditional values. The participants in this research had a clear sense of their identity. Eastern, Iraqi and Islamic are three important components of this identity, which are pit against Western identity. Media content that is

seen to be sexuality provocative and permissive, and those which advocate female agency, are dubbed Western, even if the content is produced in majority Muslim countries such as Turkey. The importance of traditional values and Iraqi identity is so much valued by the participants that even the women who praised Western women's agency, do not want Iraqi women to enjoy the same powers. The female participants' comments show that they strongly believe that the values that promote *ird* are an important part of their identity. They showed a strong tendency towards protecting this identity against what they believe to be the aggression of Western culture. This is why although the media is presenting alternative less restrictive attitudes towards sex to women, which can lead to their freedom from *ird*-based restrictions, many women would not actually want this lifestyle, simply because it is in contrast with their identity. Protecting Iraqi identity and the cultural values that shape it is done through individual actors, as the Iraqi state agencies do not have a programme or initiative to take on this responsibility. This is a very important dimension in the process of media consumption and use in Iraq, as it strengthens men's responsibility to protect their *ird*, especially because, as this research has demonstrated, they feel their identity is increasingly under threat from the media.

In this environment, it is important to examine whether the media is indeed helping women to challenge patriarchy. Thus, this research has addressed the following question: Has the media helped women achieve gender equality?

### **8.3 Media as an Emancipatory Force?**

The rush of Western/Westernised content and ideas available through satellite TV and also services that are available via the internet, in an environment where the state is completely absent, has led to the reassertion and strengthening of the practice of *ird*. During Saddam, the media environment in the world, including the Arab World was revolutionised, but Iraq

was completely isolated from this world, as a result of the extremely strict policy of state censorship (Al-Rawi 2012). The limited media content that was available on state owned and run channels was largely compatible with Iraqi gender culture. The 2003 invasion allowed an uncontrolled rush of a variety of media content and technologies in the complete absence of state agencies, transforming Iraq from the most restricted society in the region in terms of media, to the most uncontrolled and open society. In this environment, where gender culture is viewed as being under threat from Western culture, resorting to *ird* and enacting it in a stricter manner seems to be the solution in the minds of the majority of the interviewees. This is in line with reports that emphasise an increase in honour-based violence in Iraq. One media report states, “what is exceptional about [honour-based] crime in Iraq is that it has become more deeply rooted than ever, although the opposite should have happened, given social and cultural developments and media openness” (Bassem 2013). There are no reliable statistics that compare honour-based violence cases before and after 2003. Even gathering information about the most severe and obvious enactment of honour, that is, murder, has proved difficult. To attempt to gather information about other aspects of the practice of *ird* that are subtler and much less likely to be reported is simply impossible. But as the evidence in this thesis suggests, threats to *ird*, mainly perceived as coming from the media, are encouraging men to reassert their honour. The media is providing an alternative narrative to the prevalent gender culture in Iraq. This surely encourages women to deviate from what are perceived as traditional cultural values. However, as these alternative ideologies undermine the traditions of the country that are so revered and respected, and especially *ird* which is a hegemonic masculine system that helps sustain men’s dominance, many men are trying to tighten their grip on women to keep control of them. The post Saddam era has certainly not been a very good one for the women of Iraq. The progress that was made over decades to bring about a more equal society has regressed

for a variety of reasons. This has been widely acknowledged by a range of academic research carried out in this field (Al-Ali and Pratt 2008; Ismael and Ismael 2007), but the role of the media in relation to gender culture had not been explored. This research has shown that when it comes to gender relations, the post-Saddam media environment plays a contradictory role. On the one hand, it has provided women with an alternative gender culture and helped them to find ways of bypassing the boundaries of Iraqi patriarchy; on the other hand, it has provided an environment where men feel they have to try and restrict women even more.

#### **8.4 Project Limitations and Future Research Possibilities**

This research project has explored the relationship between media consumption and use in post Saddam Iraq, mainly through conducting semi-structured interviews. While this has enabled key aspects of media consumption processes in a gendered environment to be examined, there are, of course, limitations to this research. First, interviewing as a method cannot capture various aspects of media use and consumption and its relationship with gender relations at home. As most media consumption and use takes place in domestic environments (this is even more accurate for Iraq, as mobile data is not as widespread as in developed countries), it would have been beneficial to carry out content analysis on TV programs that are watched by selected families and to do some co-watching, to develop an understanding of how views of ‘appropriate media content’ are applied to specific texts; what makes some TV content not compatible with gender culture whilst others are ‘appropriate’ for general viewing, and to explore how different methods of domestication of media are implemented at home. Another interesting area that could have been explored, had there been the opportunity to conduct the research through observing media related behaviour, is to see how the media consumption setting is arranged. This would have been very informative, as gender relations have an important role in shaping this setting. But

having said that, due to the *ird*-related codes described, it would have been almost impossible for a male researcher to do so, unless the household was *marham*. Moreover, limiting the research to *mahram* only households would be extremely limiting for the scope of the research. A female researcher, however, could enjoy more freedom in carrying out this type of research, without interrupting the gender related codes in Iraqi families. Another important benefit of observing media related behaviours in domestic environments is that it would open up horizons for future research regarding media and gender culture in Iraq.

This research project has explored how ideas and pictures mediated through satellite TV and the internet are received in Iraq. A logical follow on from this would be to explore the extent to which the increasing number of Iraqi diaspora shape gender relations in post-Saddam Iraq. This period has witnessed a phenomenal increase in the number of Iraqis who have left the country as a result of the political and security crises. New developments and innovations in media technology have enabled Iraqis (and indeed many other nations) to stay in contact with their family members abroad like never before. Various applications allow file sharing as well as voice and video calls. Also, people can now broadcast live through various applications such as Facebook and Twitter. As people in diaspora adopt the cultural norms and values that are prevalent in the host country, they communicate them to their home countries via the media. This is an area that has not attracted much academic commentary and would be an interesting path to further the current research.

Another interesting research path would be to explore the relationship between the sexual content in the media and women's emancipation. As sexuality is the main site of Iraqi patriarchy, through which men assert their domination over women, an alternative attitude towards sex that gives women sexual agency would undermine Iraqi patriarchy. The question here is whether sexual content in the media is actually helping women to break away from the restraints of patriarchal structures. Media content has been accused of

perpetuating female sexual objectification (for example see Aubrey, 2006). Media content is becoming increasingly sexualised and focusing on the body and appearances, but there is a gender difference in the way bodies are shown. The way that women's bodies are depicted tends to sexually objectify them more so than men (Crawford and Unger 2004). In this sense, women are reduced to instruments for pleasing men; they are no longer persons, but tools at the disposal of men. This certainly creates a power base that is in favour of men. The interesting question for future research on media and gender in Iraq could involve a question about this subtle matter. Women's bodies and sexuality is a territory controlled by men. *Ird*-based patriarchy takes control of women's bodies by restricting women's sexual choices. On the other hand, the over-sexualised media content reduces women to mere sexual objects. These structures, both lead to power relations that are in favour of men. These two types of approaches to women's' sexuality at first glance seem to be extremely far from each other, hence the objections of important sectors of Iraqi society to Western/Westernised media content. But in fact, they both dominate women by taking control of their sexuality. *Ird* creates a power relation that places women in an inferior position through restricting their sexuality. Iraqi women's exposure to media content that portrays a more liberal alternative to sexuality allows women to partially distance themselves from that oppressive situation. Future research could ask the following question: is more exposure to increasingly sexualised media content going to help Iraqi women to achieve gender equality, or will it bring them under a different type of patriarchy in which women are treated as sex objects?

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## **Appendix: Interview Schedule**

### **Category 1: Women:**

- **Demographic Questions:**

1. Age?
2. Place of Residency?
3. Education?
4. Occupation?
5. Marital Status?

- **Main Questions:**

#### **Equality & Iraqi society:**

1. To what extent do you think that women possess natural rights in the same way as men do? Discuss.
2. Do you feel or experience any discrimination against yourself or women in general in society? Elaborate.

#### **Satellite TV Channels**

1. Do you have access to Satellite TV channels?
2. Do you watch Satellite TV channels? If yes, for how long? How often?
3. For what purposes do you normally watch Satellite TV channels? Education? Entertainment? etc.
4. Which programmes do you normally watch? Do you have a favourite type of Satellite TV programmes?

#### **Iraqi Women & Satellite TV Channels**

1. What do you think about the way women are depicted in these programmes?
  - a) Do you like to be like them?
  - b) Do you want Iraq to be like their countries?

2. What is your impression about the fact that Iraqi women are exposed to Satellite TV channels? Why?
3. To what extent do you believe women must or mustn't watch Satellite TV programmes? Elaborate?
4. To what extent do you think that women's exposure to Satellite TV programmes is helping or harming the society? In what sense?
  - a) Do different ideas that women are exposed to through Satellite TV programmes have a positive or negative influence on the society?
  - b) Is it a source of conflict between women and men, on different levels? Within family for example?
  - c) Or between women and religion and Iraqi traditions?
  - d) Or between women and the state?
  - e) Or between women and the political parties?
5. If you believe that inequality exists within society, do you think the introduction of Satellite TV channels is helping women towards achieving equality with men? If yes, how?
6. To what extent do you find watching Satellite TV channels make you think differently about yourself as a woman? What issues have they alerted you to?
  - a) In comparison to your life before the conflict when access to Satellite TV was non-existent, is your exposure to Satellite TV channels leading you to think differently about what it means to be a woman? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is watching Satellite TV channels changing your idea about what it means to be a woman? Elaborate.
7. To what extent do you believe that Satellite TV channels have helped you to raise your awareness about your rights as a woman? Elaborate.
8. To what extent do you find watching Satellite TV channels make men think differently about women? What issues have they alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to Satellite TV was non-existent, is men's exposure to Satellite TV channels leading them to think differently about women? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is watching Satellite TV channels changing men's idea about women? Elaborate.

9. To what extent do you believe that Satellite TV channels have helped men to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.

### **The Internet**

1. Do you have access to the Internet?
2. Do you use the Internet? If yes, for how long? How often?
3. For what purposes do you normally use the Internet? Education? Entertainment? Socialising? etc.
4. Which type of activity do you normally have when using the Internet? Do you have a favourite type of websites or activities?
  - a) Do you brows any web pages which deal with women's rights? If yes, why?

### **Iraqi Women & the Internet**

1. What is your impression about the fact that Iraqi women are exposed to the Internet contents? Why?
2. To what extent do you believe women must or mustn't use the Internet? Elaborate?
3. To what extent do you think that women's exposure to the Internet is helping or harming the society? In what sense?
  - a) Do different ideas that women are exposed to through the Internet have a positive or negative influence on the society?
  - b) Is it a source of conflict between women and men, on different levels? Within family for example?
  - c) Or between women and religion and Iraqi traditions?
  - d) Or between women and the state?
  - e) Or between women and the political parties?
4. If you believe that inequality exists within society, do you think the introduction of the Internet is helping women towards achieving equality with men? If yes, how?
5. To what extent do you find using the Internet make you think differently about yourself as a woman and your rights? What issues has it alerted you to?



- a) In comparison to your life before the conflict when access to the Internet was non-existent, is the Internet usage leading you to think differently about what it means to be a woman? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is the internet usage changing your idea about what it means to be a woman? Elaborate.
6. To what extent do you believe that the Internet has helped you to raise your awareness about your rights? Elaborate.
7. To what extent do you find the Internet makes men think differently about women? What issues have they alerted them to?
- a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to the Internet was non-existent, is men's internet usage leading them to think differently about women? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is internet usage changing men's idea about women? Elaborate.
8. To what extent do you believe that the Internet has helped men to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.

## **Category 2: Men:**

- **Demographic Questions:**

1. Age?
2. Place of Residency?
3. Education?
4. Occupation?
5. Marital Status?

- **Main Questions:**

### **Equality & Iraqi society:**

1. To what extent do you think that women possess natural rights in the same way as men do? Discuss.
2. Do you believe any discrimination against women exists in society? Elaborate.

### **Satellite TV Channels**

1. Do you have access to Satellite TV channels?
2. Do you watch Satellite TV channels? If yes, for how long? How often?
3. For what purposes do you normally watch Satellite TV channels? Education? Entertainment? etc.
4. Which programmes do you normally watch? Do you have a favourite type of Satellite TV programmes?

### **Iraqi Men & Satellite TV Channels**

1. What do you think about the way women are depicted in these programmes?
  - a) Do you like Iraqi women to be like them?
  - b) Do you want Iraq to be like their countries?
2. What is your impression about the fact that Iraqi women are exposed to Satellite TV channels? Why?
3. To what extent do you believe women must or mustn't watch Satellite TV programmes? Elaborate?

4. To what extent do you think that women's exposure to Satellite TV programmes is helping or harming the society? In what sense?
  - a) Do different ideas that women are exposed to through Satellite TV programmes have a positive or negative influence on the society?
  - b) Is it a source of conflict between women and men, on different levels? Within family for example?
  - c) Or between women and religion and Iraqi traditions?
  - d) Or between women and the state?
  - e) Or between women and the political parties?
5. If you believe that inequality exists within society, do you think the introduction of Satellite TV channels is helping women towards achieving equality with men? If yes, how?
6. To what extent do you find watching Satellite TV channels make you think differently about women? What issues have they alerted you to?
  - a) In comparison to your life before the conflict when access to Satellite TV was non-existent, is your exposure to Satellite TV channels leading you to think differently about women? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is watching Satellite TV channels changing your idea about women? Elaborate.
7. To what extent do you believe that Satellite TV channels have helped you to raise your awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
8. To what extent do you find watching Satellite TV channels make women think differently about women? What issues have they alerted you to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to Satellite TV was non-existent, is women's exposure to Satellite TV channels leading them to think differently about what it means to be a woman? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is watching Satellite TV channels changing your idea about women? Elaborate.
9. To what extent do you believe that Satellite TV channels have helped women to raise their awareness about their rights? Elaborate.
  - c)

### **The Internet**

1. Do you have access to the Internet?
2. Do you use the Internet? If yes, for how long? How often?
3. For what purposes do you normally use the Internet? Education? Entertainment? Socialising? etc.
4. Which type of activity do you normally have when using the Internet? Do you have a favourite type of websites or activities?

### **Iraqi Men & the Internet**

1. What is your impression about the fact that Iraqi women are exposed to the Internet contents? Why?
2. To what extent do you believe women must or mustn't use the Internet? Elaborate?
3. To what extent do you think that women's exposure to the Internet is helping or harming the society? In what sense?
  - a) Do different ideas that women are exposed to through the Internet have a positive or negative influence on society?
  - b) Is it a source of conflict between women and men, on different levels? Within family for example?
  - c) Or between women and religion and Iraqi traditions?
  - d) Or between women and the state?
  - e) Or between women and the political parties?
4. If you believe that inequality exists within society, do you think the introduction of the Internet is helping women towards achieving equality with men? If yes, how?
5. To what extent do you find using the Internet make you think differently about women? What issues has it alerted you to?
  - a) In comparison to your life before the conflict when access to the Internet was non-existent, is the Internet usage leading you to think differently about women? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is the internet usage changing your idea about women? Elaborate
6. To what extent do you believe that the Internet has helped you to raise your awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.

7. To what extent do you find using the Internet make women think differently about what it means to be a woman? What issues has it alerted you to?
  - c) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to the Internet was non-existent, is the Internet usage leading women to think differently about what it means to be a woman? If yes, how?
  - d) In what ways, if any, is the internet usage changing your idea about women? Elaborate
8. To what extent do you believe that the Internet has helped women to raise their awareness about their rights? Elaborate.

### **Category 3: Politicians & Government officials:**

- **Preliminary Questions:**

1. How old are you?
2. What party do you belong to?

- **Main Questions:**

#### **Equality & Iraqi society:**

1. To what extent do you think that women possess natural rights in the same way as men do? Discuss.
2. Do you believe any discrimination against women exists in society? Elaborate.
3. Do you have any activities in regard to women's rights? If yes, explain. If not, why?
4. According to article 14 of the new Iraqi constitution, Iraqi citizens are equal before law without discrimination based on gender; do you think this article has been implemented properly? If yes, in what sense? If not, what are the obstacles?
5. What were/are your plans to help implement the article 14 of the Iraqi new constitution? Explain.

#### **Satellite TV Channels**

1. Do you watch Satellite TV channels?
2. What do you think about the way women are depicted in Satellite TV programmes?
  - a) Do you think that Iraqi women should look at women in these programmes as role models?
  - b) Do you believe that Iraq should take these countries' path in regard to women' status?
3. What is your impression about the fact that Iraqi women are exposed to Satellite TV channels? Why?
4. To what extent do you believe women must or mustn't watch Satellite TV programmes? Elaborate?
5. To what extent do you think that women's exposure to Satellite TV programmes is helping or harming the society? In what sense?
  - a) Do different ideas that women are exposed to through Satellite TV programmes have a positive or negative influence on the society?

- b) Is it a source of conflict between women and men, on different levels?  
Within family for example?
  - c) Or between women and religion and Iraqi traditions?
  - d) Or between women and the state?
  - e) Or between women and the political parties?
- 6. If you believe that inequality exists within society, do you think the introduction of Satellite TV channels is helping women towards achieving equality with men?  
If yes, how?
- 7. To what extent do you find watching Satellite TV channels make women think differently about themselves as a woman? What issues have they alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to Satellite TV was non-existent, is women's exposure to Satellite TV channels leading them to think differently about what it means to be a woman? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is watching Satellite TV channels changing women's idea about what it means to be a woman? Elaborate.
- 8. To what extent do you believe that Satellite TV channels have helped women to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
- 9. To what extent do you find watching Satellite TV channels make men think differently about women? What issues have they alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to Satellite TV was non-existent, is men's exposure to Satellite TV channels leading them to think differently about women? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is watching Satellite TV channels changing men's idea about women? Elaborate.
- 10. To what extent do you believe that Satellite TV channels have helped men to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
- 11. To what extent has watching Satellite TV channels changed your idea about women? Elaborate.
- 12. Do you exploit Satellite TV channels to support women's equality? If yes, how?  
If not? Why?

### **The Internet**

1. Do you use the Internet?

2. What is your impression about the fact that Iraqi women are exposed to the Internet contents? Why?
3. To what extent do you believe women must or mustn't use the Internet? Elaborate?
4. To what extent do you think that women's exposure to the Internet is helping or harming the society? In what sense?
  - a) Do different ideas that women are exposed to through the Internet have a positive or negative influence on society?
  - b) Is it a source of conflict between women and men, on different levels? Within family for example?
  - c) Or between women and religion and Iraqi traditions?
  - d) Or between women and the state?
  - e) Or between women and the political parties?
5. If you believe that inequality exists within society, do you think the introduction of the Internet is helping women towards achieving equality with men? If yes, how?
6. To what extent do you find using the Internet make women think differently about themselves as women? What issues has it alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to the Internet was non-existent, is the Internet usage leading women to think differently about what it means to be a woman? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is the internet usage changing women's idea about what it means to be a woman? Elaborate.
7. To what extent do you believe that the Internet has helped women to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
8. To what extent do you find using the Internet make men think differently about women? What issues have they alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to the Internet was non-existent, is the Internet usage leading men to think differently about women? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is internet usage changing men's idea about women? Elaborate.
9. To what extent do you believe that the Internet have helped men to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.



10. To what extent has the Internet usage changed your idea about women?
11. Do you have any initiatives or are part of a plan, using the Internet to help achieve equality for women? If yes, how? If not, why?

#### **Category 4: Clerics:**

- **Preliminary Questions:**

1. General Information?

- **Main Questions:**

#### **Equality & Iraqi society:**

1. To what extent do you think that women possess natural rights in the same way as men do? Discuss.
2. Do you believe any discrimination against women exists in society? Elaborate.

#### **Satellite TV Channels**

1. Do you watch Satellite TV channels?
2. What do you think about the way women are depicted in Satellite TV programmes?
  - a) Do you think that Iraqi women should look at women in these programmes as role models?
  - b) Do you believe that Iraq should take these countries' path in regard to women's status?
3. What is your impression about the fact that Iraqi women are exposed to Satellite TV channels? Why?
4. To what extent do you believe women must or mustn't watch Satellite TV programmes? Elaborate?
5. To what extent do you think that women's exposure to Satellite TV programmes is helping or harming the society? In what sense?
  - a) Do different ideas that women are exposed to through Satellite TV programmes have a positive or negative influence on the society?
  - b) Is it a source of conflict between women and men, on different levels? Within family for example?
  - c) Or between women and religion and Iraqi traditions?
  - d) Or between women and the state?
  - e) Or between women and the political parties?
6. If you believe that inequality exists within society, do you think the introduction of Satellite TV channels is helping women towards achieving equality with men? If yes, how?

7. To what extent do you find watching Satellite TV channels make women think differently about themselves as a woman? What issues have they alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to Satellite TV was non-existent, is women's exposure to Satellite TV channels leading them to think differently about what it means to be a woman? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is watching Satellite TV channels changing women's idea about what it means to be a woman? Elaborate.
8. To what extent do you believe that Satellite TV channels have helped women to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
9. To what extent do you find watching Satellite TV channels make men think differently about women? What issues have they alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to Satellite TV was non-existent, is men's exposure to Satellite TV channels leading them to think differently about women? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is watching Satellite TV channels changing men's idea about women? Elaborate.
10. To what extent has watching Satellite TV channels changed your idea about women? Elaborate.
11. To what extent do you believe that Satellite TV channels have helped men to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.

### **The Internet**

1. Do you use the Internet?
2. What is your impression about the fact that Iraqi women are exposed to the Internet contents? Why?
3. To what extent do you believe women must or mustn't use the Internet? Elaborate?
4. To what extent do you think that women's exposure to the Internet is helping or harming the society? In what sense?
  - a) Do different ideas that women are exposed to through the Internet have a positive or negative influence on society?
  - b) Is it a source of conflict between women and men, on different levels? Within family for example?

- c) Or between women and religion and Iraqi traditions?
  - d) Or between women and the state?
  - e) Or between women and the political parties?
5. If you believe that inequality exists within society, do you think the introduction of the Internet is helping women towards achieving equality with men? If yes, how?
  6. To what extent do you find using the Internet make women think differently about themselves as women? What issues has it alerted them to?
    - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to the Internet was non-existent, is the Internet usage leading women to think differently about what it means to be a woman? If yes, how?
    - b) In what ways, if any, is the internet usage changing women's idea about what it means to be a woman? Elaborate.
  7. To what extent do you believe that the Internet has helped women to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
  8. To what extent do you find using the Internet make men think differently about women? What issues have they alerted them to?
    - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to the Internet was non-existent, is the Internet usage leading men to think differently about women? If yes, how?
    - b) In what ways, if any, is internet usage changing men's idea about women? Elaborate.
  9. To what extent do you believe that the Internet have helped men to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
  10. To what extent has the Internet usage changed your idea about women?

### **Category 5: University Lecturers:**

- **Preliminary Questions:**

1. How old are you?
2. What is your speciality?

- **Main Questions:**

#### **Equality & Iraqi society:**

1. To what extent do you think that women possess natural rights in the same way as men do? Discuss.
2. Do you believe any discrimination against women exists in society? Elaborate.
3. Do you have any activities in regard to women's rights? If yes, explain.

#### **Satellite TV Channels**

1. Do you watch Satellite TV channels?
2. What do you think about the way women are depicted in Satellite TV programmes?
  - a) Do you think that Iraqi women should look at women in these programmes as role models?
  - b) Do you believe that Iraq should take these countries' path in regard to women's status?
3. What is your impression about the fact that Iraqi women are exposed to Satellite TV channels? Why?
4. To what extent do you believe women must or mustn't watch Satellite TV programmes? Elaborate?
5. To what extent do you think that women's exposure to Satellite TV programmes is helping or harming the society? In what sense?
  - a) Do different ideas that women are exposed to through Satellite TV programmes have a positive or negative influence on the society?
  - b) Is it a source of conflict between women and men, on different levels? Within family for example?
  - c) Or between women and religion and Iraqi traditions?
  - d) Or between women and the state?
  - e) Or between women and the political parties?

6. If you believe that inequality exists within society, do you think the introduction of Satellite TV channels is helping women towards achieving equality with men? If yes, how?
7. To what extent do you find watching Satellite TV channels make women think differently about themselves as a woman? What issues have they alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to Satellite TV was non-existent, is women's exposure to Satellite TV channels leading them to think differently about what it means to be a woman? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is watching Satellite TV channels changing women's idea about what it means to be a woman? Elaborate.
8. To what extent do you believe that Satellite TV channels have helped women to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
9. To what extent do you find watching Satellite TV channels make men think differently about women? What issues have they alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to Satellite TV was non-existent, is men's exposure to Satellite TV channels leading them to think differently about women? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is watching Satellite TV channels changing men's idea about women? Elaborate.
10. To what extent do you believe that Satellite TV channels have helped men to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
11. To what extent has watching Satellite TV channels changed your idea about women? Elaborate.

### **The Internet**

1. Do you use the Internet?
2. What is your impression about the fact that Iraqi women are exposed to the Internet contents? Why?
3. To what extent do you believe women must or mustn't use the Internet? Elaborate?
4. To what extent do you think that women's exposure to the Internet is helping or harming the society? In what sense?

- a) Do different ideas that women are exposed to through the Internet have a positive or negative influence on society?
  - b) Is it a source of conflict between women and men, on different levels? Within family for example?
  - c) Or between women and religion and Iraqi traditions?
  - d) Or between women and the state?
  - e) Or between women and the political parties?
5. If you believe that inequality exists within society, do you think the introduction of the Internet is helping women towards achieving equality with men? If yes, how?
  6. To what extent do you find using the Internet make women think differently about themselves as women? What issues has it alerted them to?
    - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to the Internet was non-existent, is the Internet usage leading women to think differently about what it means to be a woman? If yes, how?
    - b) In what ways, if any, is the internet usage changing women's idea about what it means to be a woman? Elaborate.
  7. To what extent do you believe that the Internet has helped women to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
  8. To what extent do you find using the Internet make men think differently about women? What issues have they alerted them to?
    - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to the Internet was non-existent, is the Internet usage leading men to think differently about women? If yes, how?
    - b) In what ways, if any, is internet usage changing men's idea about women? Elaborate.
  9. To what extent do you believe that the Internet have helped men to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
  10. To what extent has the Internet usage changed your idea about women?

### **Category 6: Tribe Chiefs:**

- **Preliminary Questions:**

1. How old are you?

- **Main Questions:**

#### **Equality & Iraqi society:**

1. To what extent do you think that women possess natural rights in the same way as men do? Discuss.
2. Do you believe any discrimination against women exists in society? Elaborate.

#### **Satellite TV Channels**

1. Do you watch Satellite TV channels?
2. What do you think about the way women are depicted in Satellite TV programmes?
  - a) Do you think that Iraqi women should look at women in these programmes as role models?
  - b) Do you believe that Iraq should take these countries' path in regard to women's status?
3. What is your impression about the fact that Iraqi women are exposed to Satellite TV channels? Why?
4. To what extent do you believe women must or mustn't watch Satellite TV programmes? Elaborate?
5. To what extent do you think that women's exposure to Satellite TV programmes is helping or harming the society? In what sense?
  - a) Do different ideas that women are exposed to through Satellite TV programmes have a positive or negative influence on the society?
  - b) Is it a source of conflict between women and men, on different levels? Within family for example?
  - c) Or between women and religion and Iraqi traditions?
  - d) Or between women and the state?
  - e) Or between women and the political parties?
6. If you believe that inequality exists within society, do you think the introduction of Satellite TV channels is helping women towards achieving equality with men? If yes, how?



7. To what extent do you find watching Satellite TV channels make women think differently about themselves as a woman? What issues have they alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to Satellite TV was non-existent, is women's exposure to Satellite TV channels leading them to think differently about what it means to be a woman? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is watching Satellite TV channels changing women's idea about what it means to be a woman? Elaborate.
8. To what extent do you believe that Satellite TV channels have helped women to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
9. To what extent do you find watching Satellite TV channels make men think differently about women? What issues have they alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to Satellite TV was non-existent, is men's exposure to Satellite TV channels leading them to think differently about women? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is watching Satellite TV channels changing men's idea about women? Elaborate.
10. To what extent do you believe that Satellite TV channels have helped men to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
11. To what extent has watching Satellite TV channels changed your idea about women? Elaborate.

### **The Internet**

1. Do you use the Internet?
2. What is your impression about the fact that Iraqi women are exposed to the Internet contents? Why?
3. To what extent do you believe women must or mustn't use the Internet? Elaborate?
4. To what extent do you think that women's exposure to the Internet is helping or harming the society? In what sense?
  - a) Do different ideas that women are exposed to through the Internet have a positive or negative influence on society?
  - b) Is it a source of conflict between women and men, on different levels? Within family for example?

- c) Or between women and religion and Iraqi traditions?
  - d) Or between women and the state?
  - e) Or between women and the political parties?
5. If you believe that inequality exists within society, do you think the introduction of the Internet is helping women towards achieving equality with men? If yes, how?
  6. To what extent do you find using the Internet make women think differently about themselves as women? What issues has it alerted them to?
    - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to the Internet was non-existent, is the Internet usage leading women to think differently about what it means to be a woman? If yes, how?
    - b) In what ways, if any, is the internet usage changing women's idea about what it means to be a woman? Elaborate.
  7. To what extent do you believe that the Internet has helped women to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
  8. To what extent do you find using the Internet make men think differently about women? What issues have they alerted them to?
    - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to the Internet was non-existent, is the Internet usage leading men to think differently about women? If yes, how?
    - b) In what ways, if any, is internet usage changing men's idea about women? Elaborate.
  9. To what extent do you believe that the Internet have helped men to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
  10. To what extent has the Internet usage changed your idea about women?

### **Category 7: Journalists:**

- **Preliminary Questions:**

1. How old are you?
2. Which media institution do you work for?

- **Main Questions:**

#### **Equality & Iraqi society:**

1. To what extent do you think that women possess natural rights in the same way as men do? Discuss.
2. Do you believe any discrimination against women exists in society? Elaborate.
3. Do you have any activities in regard to women's rights? If yes, explain.

#### **Satellite TV Channels**

1. Do you watch Satellite TV channels?
2. What do you think about the way women are depicted in Satellite TV programmes?
  - a) Do you think that Iraqi women should look at women in these programmes as role models?
  - b) Do you believe that Iraq should take these countries' path in regard to women's status?
3. What is your impression about the fact that Iraqi women are exposed to Satellite TV channels? Why?
4. To what extent do you believe women must or mustn't watch Satellite TV programmes? Elaborate?
5. To what extent do you think that women's exposure to Satellite TV programmes is helping or harming the society? In what sense?
  - a) Do different ideas that women are exposed to through Satellite TV programmes have a positive or negative influence on the society?
  - b) Is it a source of conflict between women and men, on different levels? Within family for example?
  - c) Or between women and religion and Iraqi traditions?
  - d) Or between women and the state?
  - e) Or between women and the political parties?

6. If you believe that inequality exists within society, do you think the introduction of Satellite TV channels is helping women towards achieving equality with men? If yes, how?
7. To what extent do you find watching Satellite TV channels make women think differently about themselves as a woman? What issues have they alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to Satellite TV was non-existent, is women's exposure to Satellite TV channels leading them to think differently about what it means to be a woman? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is watching Satellite TV channels changing women's idea about what it means to be a woman? Elaborate.
8. To what extent do you believe that Satellite TV channels have helped women to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
9. To what extent do you find watching Satellite TV channels make men think differently about women? What issues have they alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to Satellite TV was non-existent, is men's exposure to Satellite TV channels leading them to think differently about women? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is watching Satellite TV channels changing men's idea about women? Elaborate.
10. To what extent do you believe that Satellite TV channels have helped men to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
11. To what extent has watching Satellite TV channels changed your idea about women? Elaborate.
12. Do you exploit Satellite TV channels to support women's equality? Do you have any initiatives using Satellite TV channels to help achieve equality for women? If yes, how? If not, why?

### **The Internet**

1. Do you use the Internet?
2. What is your impression about the fact that Iraqi women are exposed to the Internet contents? Why?
3. To what extent do you believe women must or mustn't use the Internet? Elaborate?

4. To what extent do you think that women's exposure to the Internet is helping or harming the society? In what sense?
  - a) Do different ideas that women are exposed to through the Internet have a positive or negative influence on society?
  - b) Is it a source of conflict between women and men, on different levels? Within family for example?
  - c) Or between women and religion and Iraqi traditions?
  - d) Or between women and the state?
  - e) Or between women and the political parties?
5. If you believe that inequality exists within society, do you think the introduction of the Internet is helping women towards achieving equality with men? If yes, how?
6. To what extent do you find using the Internet make women think differently about themselves as women? What issues has it alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to the Internet was non-existent, is the Internet usage leading women to think differently about what it means to be a woman? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is the internet usage changing women's idea about what it means to be a woman? Elaborate.
7. To what extent do you believe that the Internet has helped women to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
8. To what extent do you find using the Internet make men think differently about women? What issues have they alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to the Internet was non-existent, is the Internet usage leading men to think differently about women? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is internet usage changing men's idea about women? Elaborate.
9. To what extent do you believe that the Internet have helped men to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
10. To what extent has the Internet usage changed your idea about women?
11. Do you exploit the Internet to support women's equality? Do you have any initiatives using the Internet to help achieve equality for women? If yes, how? If not, why?

### **Category 8: Women's Rights activists.**

- **Preliminary Questions:**

1. How old are you?
2. What organisation do you belong to?

- **Main Questions:**

#### **Equality & Iraqi society**

1. According to article 14 of the new Iraqi constitution, Iraqi citizens are equal before law without discrimination based on gender; do you think this article has been implemented properly? If yes, in what sense? If not, what are the obstacles?
2. What were/are your plans to help implement the article 14 of the new Iraqi constitution? Explain.

#### **Satellite TV Channels**

1. Do you watch Satellite TV channels?
2. What do you think about the way women are depicted in Satellite TV programmes?
  - a) Do you think that Iraqi women should look at women in these programmes as role models?
  - b) Do you believe that Iraq should take these countries' path in regard to women's status?
3. What is your impression about the fact that Iraqi women are exposed to Satellite TV channels? Why?
4. To what extent do you believe women must or mustn't watch Satellite TV programmes? Elaborate?
5. To what extent do you think that women's exposure to Satellite TV programmes is helping or harming the society? In what sense?
  - a) Do different ideas that women are exposed to through Satellite TV programmes have a positive or negative influence on the society?
  - b) Is it a source of conflict between women and men, on different levels? Within family for example?
  - c) Or between women and religion and Iraqi traditions?
  - d) Or between women and the state?
  - e) Or between women and the political parties?

6. To what extent do you think the introduction of Satellite TV channels is helping women towards achieving equality with men? Explain.
7. To what extent do you find watching Satellite TV channels makes women think differently about themselves as a woman? What issues have they alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to Satellite TV was non-existent, is women's exposure to Satellite TV channels leading them to think differently about what it means to be a woman? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is watching Satellite TV channels changing women's idea about what it means to be a woman? Elaborate.
8. To what extent do you believe that Satellite TV channels have helped women to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
9. To what extent do you find watching Satellite TV channels make men think differently about women? What issues have they alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to Satellite TV was non-existent, is men's exposure to Satellite TV channels leading them to think differently about women? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is watching Satellite TV channels changing men's idea about women? Elaborate.
10. To what extent do you believe that Satellite TV channels have helped men to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
11. To what extent has watching satellite TV changed your idea about women?
12. Do you exploit Satellite TV channels to achieve your goals? Do you have any initiatives using Satellite TV channels to help achieve equality for women? If yes, how? If not, why?

### **The Internet**

1. Do you use the Internet?
2. Do you exploit the Internet to achieve your goals? Do you have any initiatives using the Internet to help achieve equality for women? If yes, how? If not, why?
3. What is your impression about the fact that Iraqi women are exposed to the Internet contents? Why?
4. To what extent do you believe women must or mustn't use the Internet? Elaborate?

5. To what extent do you think that women's exposure to the Internet is helping or harming the society? In what sense?
  - a) Do different ideas that women are exposed to through the Internet have a positive or negative influence on society?
  - b) Is it a source of conflict between women and men, on different levels? Within family for example?
  - c) Or between women and religion and Iraqi traditions?
  - d) Or between women and the state?
  - e) Or between women and the political parties?
8. To what extent do you think the introduction of the Internet is helping women towards achieving equality with men? Explain.
9. To what extent do you find using the Internet makes women think differently about themselves as women? What issues has it alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to the Internet was non-existent, is the Internet usage leading women to think differently about what it means to be a woman? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is the internet usage changing women's idea about what it means to be a woman? Elaborate.
10. To what extent do you believe that the Internet has helped women to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
11. To what extent do you find using the Internet makes men think differently about women? What issues have they alerted them to?
  - a) In comparison to the life before the conflict when access to the Internet was non-existent, is the Internet usage leading men to think differently about women? If yes, how?
  - b) In what ways, if any, is internet usage changing men's idea about women? Elaborate.
12. To what extent do you believe that the Internet have helped men to raise their awareness about women's rights? Elaborate.
13. To what extent has the Internet usage changed your idea about women?